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Godfather II

A deal Coppola couldn't refuse

by John Hess

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“The film always was a loose metaphor;
Michael as America.”—Francis Ford Coppola

GODFATHER II is the greatest Hollywood film since CITIZEN KANE and one of the three or four best Hollywood films ever made. I think the film affected me so powerfully even after several viewings because it presents and plays on most of the now threatened bourgeois values which I was taught to believe in and respect—family ties, social mobility, the quest for security and respectability in a competitive world, the friendship between men engaged in the same work, the importance of religion, and individualism. I grew up in a large, newly urbanized, upper middle-class Pennsylvania German family whose religion was Mennonite. I spent the first sixteen years or so of my life surrounded by relatives; the experience was mostly positive and comfortable. As I grew older, it and I both changed. I left it behind, but deep inside many of those ideals and the childhood experience which gave them strength remain intact.

When Michael reaches out to Connie, who has returned to the family, when a confused Michael seeks the advice of his mother, when Vito Corleone's mother begs for the life of her only remaining son, when Vito builds his family and gathers his friends—I am affected because these scenes evoke in me the past experience of and the present need for the community that is being expressed and groped for on the screen. The film's all-pervasive theme is the warmth, strength, and beauty of family ties which, in bourgeois society, alone appear to meet the desperate need we all feel for human community. The counter theme and the real strength of the film is its demonstration that the benefits of the family structure and the hope for community have been destroyed by capitalism.

Thus all those tender, moving family scenes are immediately crushed by the needs of “business,” Coppola's word for capitalism in the film.

Connie and Michael never speak after the scene mentioned above. The next time we see Michael, after the scene with his mother, he is denying before a Congressional committee that he runs drug traffic, prostitution, gambling, and other “nefarious” business activities in the State of New York. Vito’s mother is shotgunned because the very existence of the young Vito threatens the business and life of Don Ciccio. Vito’s brutal murder of Fanucci is the prelude to his success. All the tender and moving moments in the film are only warm interludes among the lies, horror, brutality, and murder.

The idealized familial cohesiveness and the power this cohesiveness seems to assure the threatened individual in our irrational, dehumanizing society explain, in part, the current interest in the Mafia and the popularity of the gangster film (especially those couple-on-the-run films such as *SUGARLAND EXPRESS*, *BADLANDS*, etc.). For the family is the last apparent refuge against the enforced socialization and alienation of human activity under capitalism. And while the defense of the family must be seen as reactionary during the transition to socialism, this defense is perfectly understandable. People do not defend the real, actual, everyday family experience, but the Ideal of the Family, the emotional communion it represents and promises, the special beauty attributed to it by bourgeois ideology (“And I take a Geritol tablet every day”).

To present and explain this complex interaction between our social system and our personal lives, Coppola set himself a large task without having the conceptual equipment—a marxist analysis of society—to carry it out clearly. *GODFATHER II* has been unfavorably compared with *THE GODFATHER*. The sequel, if we can call it that, does not have the fast pace and the drama of the first film. It does contain a great deal of sentimentality, repetition, and melodrama. By comparison with *THE GODFATHER* and *THE CONVERSATION*, it is an awkward, rough film which often seems on the verge of breaking down. Had Coppola and his coworkers had the time to edit the film properly, they might have produced a smoother film. But the basic structure and ingredients would have remained the same.

I’m second-guessing Coppola, but I see these apparent weaknesses as part of Coppola’s attempt to present his vision of the United States as he has experienced it. The slow pace, the repetition, and the lack of drama are distancing devices which are designed to prevent the kind of misunderstanding which surrounded *THE GODFATHER*.

“I was disturbed that people thought I had romanticized Michael, when I felt I had presented him as a monster at the end of *THE GODFATHER*.”⁽¹⁾

The sentimentality is there, but only to set up the audience for the demolition of the sentiments in the following sequence. The sentimentality of Vito’s arrival at Ellis Island only softens the audience up for the lawn party in the first Michael sequence which follows it.

The film works, makes its statement, through juxtaposition. Either of the segments, Michael's or Vito's, or both connected in a linear fashion, first Vito's and then Michael's, would be the traditional dynasty film, such as *GIANT*, *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS*, *WRITTEN ON THE WIND*, and *THE DAMNED*. It's in the juxtaposition, in the simultaneous presentation of the two time periods, that Coppola makes the associations necessary to produce a more analytical description of this historical process(2)

For example, in the Cuban sequence, which comes at the mid-point and is also the turning point in the film, Coppola juxtaposes a major Mafia-corporate deal with the advent of the Cuban revolution. This is as far as Coppola can go toward a socialist analysis. But only here is a counter force to the corruption of capitalism shown. Coppola can't deal with this important historical event very clearly. But one thing is clear: the venal gangsters, businessmen, and politicians, who symbolically divide up a cake with a map of Cuba in the icing, are thrown out by a superior force. This revolutionary force is superior because it does not rely on money but on the belief in a new and better way of life.

Coppola achieves his aim at the most obvious level by contrasting the rise of Vito Corleone and the degeneration of his son, Michael. The film consists of five Vito sequences, five Michael sequences, and a short coda which ties all these sequences to the previous film, *THE GODFATHER*. The transitions between the sequences concern the themes of family and business, the search for bourgeois security and its elusiveness.

The first Vito sequence ends on a note of sad hope. The young Vito, who has miraculously escaped the wrath of Don Ciccio, sits alone in a quarantine cell on Ellis Island, calling on the only community left to him—he sings a hymn. Outside the window is the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of the new, hoped-for community in the United States. Both the music and the image dissolve slowly to the first communion of Michael Anthony Corleone (Vito's grandson). The juxtaposition of the ragamuffin singing in his cell and the wealthy grandson participating in a richly appointed church service indicates hope fulfilled, in fact, represents the fulfillment of the dream of all those tattered masses who passed through the turnstiles of Ellis Island. But this appearance is quickly destroyed by the garish, hectic, repulsive lawn party at Michael's Lake Tahoe estate. Here business reigns supreme; the family has completely degenerated as have all the other familial affiliations.

The transition to the second Vito sequence occurs shortly after the attempt on Michael's life. Vito sits on his son's bed, bidding him farewell—he must leave on business. In the following Vito sequence the opposite motion occurs: Vito makes friends, gets into crime, and starts a family. That sequence ends with the infant Sonny playing on the stolen rug. From this playful, communal, nostalgic scene, Coppola cuts to Michael alone but for a bodyguard, to whom he never speaks, on a train to Miami. While Vito is gathering a family and friends, Michael is moving away from the ones he has.

The next transition is perhaps too pat and obvious. Michael returns from the unsuccessful and harrowing trip to learn that Kay has had a miscarriage (we learn later it was an abortion). Before this final image fades out, we hear the cries of Vito's new addition, Fredo, who will betray Michael as Kay has done. The next transition is particularly poignant. After murdering the Black Hand, Fanucci, Vito returns to his now even larger family, takes little Michael in his arms, and says to him, "Michael, your father loves you very much." Then there is a fade to black before we see Michael return to his nearly deserted estate, walk through the snow and look at his children's abandoned toys. The depressing gloom of this scene bitterly mocks the nostalgic warmth of the previous one.

The next transition has more to do with business. Michael goes to his mother to ask if their father ever feared he would lose his family by being strong for it. From this question, and the mumbled comment, "times are changing," we go to scenes showing Vito's growing power, to Vito's being successfully strong for his family. At the end of this Vito sequence, the establishment of Genco, an olive oil company, is juxtaposed with Michael's Congressional testimony. A silent, detached Kay sits next to Michael.

Family concerns dominate the next transition. Michael's sequence ends with his argument with Kay about the children and his yelled assertion, "I won't let you take my children." Contrasted to this familial low point is the arrival of the huge Vito Corleone family in Corleone, Sicily, for a grand, happy family reunion. Here the huge family sits around a table set outside in the bright Sicilian sunlight. At the end of this sequence, Vito waves Michael's arm from the train window, saying, "Michael, say goodbye." The funeral of Michael's mother follows this admonition.

In the final Michael sequence, Michael has three men, with whom he has been closely related throughout the film, murdered simultaneously (reminiscent of *THE GODFATHER*'s final flurry of death and religion). Hyman Roth was a close friend of Vito Corleone and Michael's business partner—in fact, it is in the deal he wanted to make with Roth that Michael had put his hope for going fully legitimate. Frankie Pentangeli was part of the Corleone Mafia family in the old days. And Fredo is Michael's own brother. Just before the murders (actually Frankie commits suicide on Michael's orders), Michael shuts the door in Kay's face when she is too slow leaving from a visit with her children, whom Michael has obviously been able to keep. The film's whole ending is a closing of doors, a settling of gloom and doom over the landscape.

At the end, there is the scene of the joyful gathering of the Corleone children, who are waiting for Don Vito to return for his birthday party in 1941. The initial harmony is destroyed when Michael announces that he has joined the Marines against his father's wishes. The scene ends with Michael sitting alone at the table as the rest go out to greet the Don. Then there is a slow dissolve to the scene in which Michael as a small boy waves goodbye from the train leaving Corleone after the happy

family reunion. The dissolve continues, however, to a close up of Michael sitting alone outside his house in the gloomy late evening light.

Only part of his face is visible on the extreme right side of the screen—the rest is nearly black. His hand covers his mouth and nose. Only his right eye and the deep wrinkles around it are clearly visible. It's the two eyes which give us "perspective," and Michael never had any. His single-minded effort to maintain and expand what his father created in the absence of any recognition of what it really was and what forces were at work in the world in which he lived, has led to increased power but also to the destruction of all meaning, to the annihilation of everything the power was supposed to insure.

Michael, as "America," embodies a basic contradiction in capitalism between the luminous bourgeois ideals of peace, freedom, opportunity, love, and community and the harsh, brutal realities of the irrational economic system which encourages these ideals and feeds off their unobtainability. (The whole function of advertising is to exacerbate this disjunction.) And a one-eyed man with his hands over his face (his human expressiveness), being squeezed out of the picture by the ominous, dreary property he struggled and killed to obtain, is the perfect image of this ugly reality of capitalism. Few films have used such extensive means (\$13 million) and created such beautiful images in order to show the corruption and perversion of the system which supplied those means.

But Coppola shows us more than just the rise and fall of a dynasty. The formal relation between the Vito sequences and the Michael sequences imply, if not directly state, a causal relation. The relationship between the two parts of the film is not a static comparison but a dynamic movement: from hope to realization, leaving the family to building a family, warm love to cold loneliness, questions to answers, admonition ("Michael, wave goodbye") to event (death of mother). The film does not compare a success with a failure, but it shows how the success leads directly and inevitably to the failure. The seeds of Michael's destruction lie in Vito's social and economic success, his rise to power. Coppola in an interview implies the same kind of causal relation.

".. I wanted to destroy the Corleone Family, and make it clear that Michael was a cold-hearted bastard murderer. But he had a qualifying history, and at one time had been an innocent. He was caught up in the events that he couldn't, or didn't turn ... they turned him."

".. I wanted him to be destroyed by forces inside of himself; the very forces that had created him. I leave GODFATHER, PART TWO, with Michael very possibly the most powerful man in America. But he is a corpse."

"I feel that the film works on a cumulative level; that the juxtaposition of the father'[Vito's] rise and the son's [Michael's] fall come together when the film is viewed in its

entirety; and that it makes an extremely moral statement regarding the self-destructive forces set loose when evil acts are performed for the alleged preservation of good [preservation of the family].”

Generally the bourgeois artist, social critic, historian, etc., can only see the inexorable destructiveness of capitalism in psychological or moral terms. But Coppola’s honesty and insight force him beyond this limitation. He shows in this film how “business” destroys the coveted bourgeois values and the familial structures set up to secure and nurture those values.

GODFATHER II presents a constant interplay between the most sought after bourgeois values—family ties, social mobility, quest for security, male comradeship, religion, and individualism—and their destruction or corruption by business. Compare, for example, the scene of young Vito in the quarantine cell on Ellis Island with what follows in slow dissolve: the richly appointed church communion of the grandson. The first scene is austere, nearly colorless; the second is cluttered with rich colors, metals, and fabrics. The thin hymn of the small boy is replaced by the deep tones of a church organ. The hope of the United States seems successful.

But the church communion is immediately followed by the harsh lawn party. As this long sequence develops, we see that all the hoped-for values are a sham. The sequence itself is fragmented by the editing of both the images and the sounds. Coppola cuts repeatedly from the garish party to the subdued meetings in Michael’s study, from bright colors (neon at night) to the near darkness of the study, from the harsh dance music to the near silence of the indoor scenes.

The important center of this expository sequence is the transaction of business with Senator Geary, with Johnny Ola, representing Hyman Roth in Miami, and with Frankie Pentangeli, who must acquiesce to the Rozano brothers. Juxtaposed with this “nefarious business” is a demonstration of how far the Corleone family has degenerated. The profligate Connie returns home with a gold digger boyfriend; we learn that she pays no attention to her children. Fredo is shown to be weak and ineffectual; one of Michael’s soldiers must remove Fredo’s drunken wife from the party because Fredo cannot control her. Frankie Pantangeli’s humorous antics at the party point out how far the Corleones have moved away from their ethnic roots—everything Italian has been forgotten, now that they live in Nevada.

The social mobility of the modest, unassuming Vito provides much of the emotional warmth of the Vito sequences, which are narrated in the golden, over-lit images we expect in nostalgia scenes of movies since *ELVIRA MADIGAN*. As these sequences move along, Vito prospers through his hard work, honesty (with his friends), and his cleverness. As we all learned at home and in school, with these traits we can’t fail—and Vito doesn’t. Or does he? At the center of Vito’s rise to power is his brutal murder of Fanucci, and in the last sequence involving Vito there

is the murder of Don Ciccio in Sicily. Of all the bloodshed in both GODFATHER movies, this last murder is the most horrible—practically a disembowelment. The murder of Fanucci is also brutal, bloody, and almost sadistic. I'm not making the moral point that these two victims didn't deserve their deaths—they certainly did. But visually the gruesomeness of these two murders conflicts—purposely—with the nostalgic beauty and charm of the rest of the Vito segments of the film. Social mobility, success, depends on brutality; this is the primary law of capitalism.

The sympathetic portrayal of friendship between men—family members or not—was one of the most endearing qualities of THE GODFATHER. In GODFATHER II many scenes evoke the same sort of comradeship which men in our society seek and which has become a popular topic in films such as CALIFORNIA SPLIT, THE STING, and many more. A good example is the early scene in which Michael, after the attempt on his life, turns over his power of attorney to Tom Hagen. “You're a brother, Tom,” Michael says. “I always wanted to be considered a real brother by you, Michael,” replies Tom, as the two men sit closely together around a small table. The whole mise-en-scene brings the two men close together. The scenes of intimacy and attempted intimacy between Michael and Fredo are also very moving. Even the heart-to-heart talks Michael has with Hyman Roth include this warmth. But Michael loses faith in Tom and kills Roth and Fredo, who betray him. Frankie Pentangeli puts all this in context:

“Your father liked Hyman Roth, your father did business with Hyman Roth, but your father never trusted Hyman Roth.”

Capitalist competition severely limits the ability of most men to become very close to any other men. Hyman Roth says the same thing more explicitly when he tells the story of Moe Green, a friend of his killed by the Corleones. Roth didn't ask who killed Green because “it had nothing to do with business.”

One of the most curious and ambiguous subjects in all the Coppola films I have seen is the Catholic church. In GODFATHER II Coppola always juxtaposes religious ceremonies with something terrible while at the same time never showing that the Church does anything for anyone. No one ever seeks or receives its comfort. Vito's brother is slain during their father's funeral procession (which opens the film). The visually and aurally beautiful communion of Michael's son is followed by the awful lawn party. The brutal murder of Fanucci takes place during a religious ceremony in the street below. Immediately following the murder of Don Ciccio, there is a scene of Vito and family outside the Corleone church with the priest.

On the one hand, one could argue that these scenes are there because the Catholic Church is an integral part of Italian/Italo-American life. But the juxtapositions are too loaded to be seen simply as local color. Religion is still an important prop of bourgeois ideology, and the Church also represents a community of sorts. But by juxtaposing it with its

opposite—murder, hatred, brutality—Coppola implicates the Church in this activity. By showing the Church's inability to comfort anyone, Coppola shows its impotence. It is one more bourgeois ideal that does not work.

Michael is the individual *par excellence*. At first one thinks of Robert Warshaw's analysis of the gangster as the man who fails because of his arrogant drive for success. The whole thing is more complex than that even in the conventional gangster film, In GODFATHER II the analysis is particularly inappropriate. In the first place, Michael succeeds—he has killed all his enemies and consolidated his power. What we see is the destruction—external and especially internal—caused by that success. In the second place, Michael has never sought great power and wealth for its own sake. He has striven—as he always says—only to preserve the family. In the conventional gangster film, the characters played by Robinson, Muni, and Cagney set out on pathological quests for wealth and power. For this arrogance they are destroyed. Since they are freaks, their destruction is seen as perfectly normal; the direct connection between them and capitalism is masked by this distortion.

Here again, Coppola's honesty provides insight. Michael's goals are those of any other businessman: security for him and his family, respectability, and opportunity for his children. Capitalism purposely provides no valid alternatives to the daily grind of worker or businessman. All are trapped in the never-ending quest for a security that doesn't exist. Thus the connection between Michael and the usual businessman is not hidden. Michael's individualism is directly associated with bourgeois values in the final sequence, the flashback to the 1941 birthday party of Don Vito. Michael has enlisted in the Marines against his father's wishes, because he has "his own plans for his life." Much of the conflict in THE GODFATHER is between Michael's desire to be a "normal" American rather than a gangster. Finally, in that film his loyalty to his family brings him into the criminal world.

Both films show the extent to which individuals are trapped, how it is impossible to "be different" without in some way leaving the system. At first Michael wanted to lead a different kind of life, but since the values he lived by were those of the system, and since the values of the Mafia are not substantially different than corporate U.S. values, Michael couldn't ultimately leave the system, or even really understand what was happening to him.

GODFATHER II clearly shows the destruction and/or unobtainability of the basic bourgeois values. They are not destroyed because they are inadequate *per se*. Family ties, social mobility, quest for security, male companionship, and even religious values all relate and correspond to real universal human needs for community, love, respect, support, appreciation. Coppola demonstrates that the social institutions—nuclear family, Mafia family, ethnic community, and the Church—upon which the Corleones relied to provide and protect these values, withered before the irrational, destructive forces of capitalism, the main goal of which is

profit, not the meeting of human needs.

Coppola builds up, interweaves, and finally destroys four levels of familial affiliations—the nuclear family, the Mafia family, the ethnic community, and the Catholic Church. Through careful juxtaposition, he shows how each strives unsuccessfully to create an ideal community. In all cases, the needs of business destroy whatever communal aspects these associations might provide. In fact, it is the very effort to conserve and support these families that becomes corrupted by business and destroys them. *GODFATHER II* works out on the level of human relations, Marx's insight that capitalism, even at its best, must destroy human life and associations to exist. Thus, the more vigorously bourgeois society strives to achieve the ideals it has set for itself, the more destructive and corrupt it becomes. And this contradiction is most clearly visible in U.S. gangsterdom, the perfect microcosm of U.S. capitalism.

Thus, the major effort in both *GOOFATHER* films is the construction of families, which are ultimately destroyed by business. Again, the film is very explicit. After the attempt on his life, Michael explains to Tom that “all our people are businessmen” and that all loyalties are based on that fact. In the early Vito sequences, much is made of the New York Italian community. In fact, Vito's first criminal activity and the first “deal he won't refuse” revolve around Vito's contempt for Fanucci, the Black Handster who terrorizes the Italian community. By making Vito seem like a Robin Hood character, protecting the community from the likes of Fanucci and the slumlord Roberto, Coppola plays a real trick on us.

The Black Hand was not an organization like the Mafia. Anyone could send a threat to a neighbor and collect money for not attacking someone's store or small business. Often these threatening notes carried the imprint of a black hand (this was before finger-printing). Sometimes small groups of men worked together in this kind of extortion racket, but just as often a single individual would collect a little money in this way. Many unsolved murders in Chicago, for example, between 1900 and 1920 were attributed to the Black Hand. Anyone with money could be a target. Big Jim Colosimo, who ruled over Chicago crime from 1910 to 1920, was himself threatened by Black Handsters. At first he paid, but then he brought in his cousin, Johnny Torrio, from New York to protect him—which Torrio did with great brutality. It was then Torrio who built up the crime organization in Chicago which Al Capone, brought to Chicago by Torrio, took over in the mid-1920s. As crime was more tightly organized in the 1920s, the Black Hand died out. But it is not true that men such as Torrio, Capone or Luciano (or Vito Corleone) protected the Italian community from anyone. They just exploited it in a more systematic way.

Be that as it may, Coppola does show that business does destroy the ethnic community; the Corleone move to Nevada symbolizes this destruction. The Corleones, in an effort to become legitimate “Americans,” have tried to remove all ethnic traces from their lifestyle.

Michael's insistence on dealing with Hyman Roth further emphasizes this change. The Vito sequences begin and end in Sicily while Michael's begin and end in Nevada. For Vito the Italian community was still a viable source of support; for Michael it is meaningless except insofar as it has to do with business. He knows enough to bring Pentangeli's brother from Sicily.

The Mafia family Vito builds up is equally fragile. The loyalties are now based on business. Michael sides with Hyman Roth, with whom he wants to make a big deal, against Frankie Pentangeli, who symbolically lives in the old Corleone house. Johnny Ola, working for Hyman Roth, is a key betrayer in the film—he gets Fredo to betray Michael. Being Italian has nothing to do with loyalties. Closer to home, sibling rivalry between Michael and his older but weaker brother, Fredo, mostly over power and business, causes Fredo to betray Michael and leads to Fredo's murder on Michael's orders. The relationship is worked out primarily on psychological terms in the film, but behind that psychology is competition for money and power. Fredo wants business of his own because that is the only way he can feel like a man. Economic dependence is a debilitating experience for anyone in this society—as the women's movement has clearly pointed out. Connie's hatred for Michael stems, in part, from financial dependence.

Finally, Michael's own nuclear family is destroyed by the very requirements of doing the business that is supposed to secure it. Michael must constantly leave his family and finally becomes a stranger to it. As expressed in an early conversation with Kay, Michael had hoped to become completely legitimate, believing somehow that that would make a difference in his life and that of his family. But the dealings with Senator Geary and the U.S. businessmen and politicians on Cuba show what Al Capone always knew—the legitimate businessmen are worse crooks than the gangsters and hypocrites, too.

In a number of Latin American films—*BLOOD OF THE CONDOR* and *THE JACKAL OF NAHUELTORO*—the directors have used disjunctions in time as a distancing device to help them analyze rather than simply create a filmic fantasy into which an audience is unthinkingly drawn. I can't say how consciously Coppola has done the same thing in *GODFATHER II*, but the destruction of conventional linearity in the film allowed him to approach closer to a Marxist analysis of our society than any other Hollywood film I know of. Clearly, this device is one that U.S. political filmmakers should keep in mind.

Notes:

[1.](#) All the Coppola quotes are from "GODFATHER II: Nothing is a Sure Thing," *City* (San Francisco), 7:54 (Dec. 11-Dec. 24, 1974), p. 34ff.

[2.](#) For an interesting account of the editing of the film, see Stephen Farber, "L.A. Journal," *Film Comment* 11:2 (March-April, 1975), p. 2.

Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore **Under the comic frosting**

by Russell E. Davis

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Is ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE controversial? Certainly it is an important project, worthy of discussion. But the points that warrant the thoughtful attention of a viewer are more a matter of firm line of story and character than arguable ideas of modern culture.

At a time when anything starring Robert Redford or Paul Newman sells automatically, the players, director, and producers deserve a vote of thanks for daring to center a substantial budget upon a woman, who is not a ladylike star either in role or personality. It is difficult to find in Alice Hyatt (Ellen Burstyn) the truly liberated woman, the focal point of the current feminist movement. This Alice, in her essential character, lacks the concentration to become the figurehead of her sisters' freedom. She readily admits that she cannot live without a man, and of course any guy, however stupid, will at once realize this and move in on her.

In several published interviews, the thrice-divorced Ms. Burstyn has said that she herself is this kind of a woman. This confusion of the star's private life and the character Alice might well be the reason why the main focus of the picture is so often blurred. The total effect of the work is one of constant shifting of emotions, feelings, relationships, saved largely by a very original style of comedy.

This uncertainty, however, is not a fatal flaw. Even if a certain amount of personal insecurity shows through Burstyn's performance, she has the combination of authority, magnetism, and self mocking humor to counterbalance this vulnerability. The actress has a wealth of talent and common sense that the character lacks.

Perhaps the really controversial point lies in exactly what the picture is about. We are accustomed to movies that begin with the statement of a problem, and that then carry the protagonist through a series of episodes to the point of either success or failure. ALICE does not match this easy format.

A clumsy prologue leads us to expect that an outspoken girl, having been intrigued by an Alice Faye movie, will grow up to devote her life to duplicating her idol's success. Without any transition, twenty-five years later Alice, in a state of unquiet desperation, is saddled with Donald (Billy Green Bush), a slob of a husband, and Tommy (Alfred Lutter), a problem son who too often reflects Alice's vocabulary, frustrations, and attitudes towards others.

Too much is left unexplained. We never understand how Alice, the forthright girl, ever grew up and settled for the dullard, who gives no indication that he was a "Good Kisser," the one attribute Alice finds in him. It is strange, too, that in this household Tommy has conceived the burning ambition to go to school.

Abruptly, when the husband is disposed of in an accident, Alice has an unexpected gift of freedom. Momentarily we are back on the conventional track. Alice sets out to rebuild her girlhood dream, in Monterey—to be another Alice Faye.

Her passable voice, coupled with a winning smile and a flash of fierce determination, give us a certain amount of hope for her. But in the end, all hints and promises about Alice and her career become pointless. Nothing substantial results. She gets and holds for a little while a job as a singer in a piano bar, but a raw encounter with Ben (Harvey Keitel), a charming psychotic, forces mother and son out on the road again. After almost slave labor in a roadside diner, Alice settles for, David (Kris Kristofferson), a calm, self-possessed rancher. He does say, "All right, I'll take you to Monterey," but there is neither a reason nor a purpose behind this promise.

In a published interview (*AFI Dialogue on Film*, April, 1975), Martin Scorsese, the director, says that the picture is not about Alice and her career, but rather it is concerned with certain real characters living in confusion. For this reason, the picture ends with Alice and Tommy on the verge of a total mutual understanding, a necessary preliminary to their successful coping with the world's chaos. The success of the mother-son relationship is the whole point of the film, David being just another guy along the way.

Confusion is a valid dramatic background, but it must never weaken the characterizations and narrative line. Above all, it must never enter the minds of the audience. But with *ALICE* as seen in the final cut, questions are automatic. Is dramatic and artistic sense destroyed by the unrealized implication that Alice will have a singing career? If David is incidental to Alice's life, why are we led to believe that he will provide the good life for her and Tommy?

Alice understands that David refused to be subservient to his first wife, but she does not question, as does the viewer, if she will be happy for very long down on the farm. With the natural alliance of mother and son so obvious, we wonder what chance for happiness David has. And there is the ultimate question about the Alice-David relationship: What do

they see in each other? Quiet David never strikes sexual fire as did the sadistic Ben. The shifting emotions, the uncertain feelings of Alice are totally alien to David's rural world.

Then, too, there is always the dividing force: Tommy. He is a brat, but without him at some length, we would miss the interaction of his personality with that of Alice. There is no shadow of the Oedipus complex here. He is sexually aware, but his chief concern is worry, not jealousy. From the first, he has his doubts about Ben, while those of Alice are easily overwhelmed. Tommy, the child, keeps asking, "What do I know?" The answer is dramatized, not stated, when he takes off his glasses to look Alice straight in the eyes with an understanding and knowledge that any mother would treasure, even as it frightened her. Another scene of similar tone is needed at the end to convey the director's idea that the complete understanding between mother and son is the keynote of the film.

Other questions will certainly arise from the film's serio-comic style, perhaps its most important contribution to cinematic art. Scorsese understands that too much realism can break a dramatic line. The same can be true in comic structure. Those addicted to the obvious humor of routine movies and television will not accept easily Scorsese's mixture of mirth and care which grows naturally from the lives of Alice's co-workers in the diner. The owner, Mel (Vic Tayback), and two waitresses: Flo (Diane Ladd) and Vera (Valerie Curtin), familiar U.S. types, are carried beyond the obvious to establish memorable characters.

We learn that Flo, of the foul mouth and heart of gold, is much concerned with the future of her bucktooth daughter. Vera, hilarious in her playing musical plates as she sorts orders, cries silently after dropping a heavy pot on her foot. She makes her character more complex when she dons a crash helmet and rides into the desert night on the back of a motor bike. Mel comes closest to reality when, with tears in his eyes and voice, he tries to run his diner in spite of his problem female staff. We can believe that he actually owns this diner, which, in a weak moment, he was conned into renting to a location troupe.

A thoroughly different comic personality is found in Audrey (Jody Foster), a stray child in jeans, product of a broken home, whose entire vocabulary seems to consist of the word "weird." In spite of her name, we think of her as a boy until an unexpected remark pinpoints her sex as female.

The uneasy alliance of humor and care is most graphically dramatized when Alice and Flo, during a break, take a sunbath behind the diner. Alice has easily overcome her distaste for Flo's earthy yaking, and the two friends exchange confidences, underlining the conversation with suggestive laughter. The sun boils down from an impersonal sky. The frame widens to take in garbage cans, then the desert, and in the distance the crouching, ever-present mountains. The soundtrack expands with the buzzing of continuous traffic on a hot pavement.

The reasons for this possible confusion and misunderstanding are well documented. ALICE began as Ellen Burstyn's personal project with her acquisition of Robert Getchell's book. After viewing Scorsese's MEAN STREETS, she was confident that he could work her way. Star and director met, found no significant frictions, and agreed that things were fine.

The money for ALICE, Scorsese's first studio-based film, was not available until a script was in evidence. The hurried book (plus the numerous ideas of all concerned with the picture) resulted in a rough cut 96 minutes long. The eventual editing of 85 minutes pared away much characterization, motivation, exposition. Scorsese says of ALICE that it was a mistake to cut the picture instead of the script. One is always reluctant to destroy the evidence of hard work that is needed to get something good on film.

No one person had the vision to set up a suitable target or the power to control the tangled forces needed to produce the film. David Susskind, one of the producers, paid so little attention to his job that he was surprised at the result. The director was under obligation to the star, who brought in several friends and associates as cast and technicians. One of these was Marcia Lucas, who made the final cut under Scorsese's supervision when he became too ill to do the work himself.

Several endings for ALICE were written. Finally, apparently by accident, Kris Kristofferson suggested leaving Alice and Tommy with their approach to a mutual understanding. Many viewers and critics have called this a cop-out. Certainly there is no indication of the director's idea that now mother and son are ready to take on the world and its problems.

Burstyn says that probably no ending would be satisfactory. Perhaps, but not necessarily. Scorsese's previous work shows clearly that he has rare talent which can be controlled by a creative, personal force. In ALICE we have the betrayal of the style and content we have the right to expect from a topflight director.

Several critics have accused the director of selling out to Hollywood. It is more likely that he was forced to agree with several whom he had expected to control. The result is a flawed picture, more interesting for its possibilities than its finished form.

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore A Hollywood liberation

by Teena Webb and Betsy Martens

from *Jump Cut*, no. 7, 1975, pp. 4-5

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We've heard that there is a new fad in today's media, especially television and movies. The working class is in vogue in documentaries, situation comedies, and features. We're not sure what this genre will be called, when and if it is "discovered," but it seems to be a blend of Hollywood fantasy and leftist realism. Like similar films produced during the 30s, these films can be viewed both as entertainment and as political comment. Generally the entertainment level is high and the political direction is confused.

But movies like this generate fairly predictable questions. Thus, in talking about *THE HARDER THEY COME*, we begin by asking if Jimmy Cliff provides a false hero model for people like him or a lesson in the results of individualism and adventurism. And is Junior in *THE LAST AMERICAN HERO* a character for emulation or an invitation to sell out? Is *BILLY JACK'S* popularity due to audience anger or to the idea of a strong individual delivering us from society's ills? And what is the political content of *MEAN STREETS*?

What these films have in common is that they all attempt to be real stories about real people, about working class or poor life, about the people who constitute the bulk of the population. A recent addition to these films which are seen as having political potential are women's films, no matter what the economic status of the woman: for example, in the United States, *WANDA*, *LOVING*, *ONE IS A LONELY NUMBER*, *IMAGES*, and *A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE*.

Women's films generally receive more critical attention than, say, current Black films, perhaps because of guilt-tripping by liberal reviewers and editors, aided by the fairly well-organized communications network among active women, a network which is as vulnerable to co-optation and profit-grubbing as any other mass form. Thus it is important to keep a critical eye peeled. *Ms.* called *ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE*, "brilliant." Pauline Kael, although

focusing generally on Burstyn's acting, points out that it is a film whose content generates discussion: "How could the new marital comedies not be controversial?"

But if we put the *New Yorker* and *Ms.* to the side for a moment, who is seeing these attempted reflections of ordinary life? HARRY AND TONTO, which also features Burstyn, is said to attract a largely older audience but is receiving minimal critical attention, even after Art Carney won an Academy Award for his performance. We're not sure that it is the wives of truck drivers who are seeing ALICE, although it seems to be doing a respectable, if not spectacular, showing at the box office. Like HARRY AND TONTO and any other movie that receives an Oscar, it has benefited from Hollywood's annual night of self-congratulations and spectacle.

In either case, a serious look at the movie involves examining its political content as well as its entertainment value: what is its message? Audiences are not likely to fall for the escape which sang and danced its way across the U.S. screen during the 30s, but perhaps a more subtle lid for public anger and frustration is available now.

This is not to say that ALICE is a "dangerous" film, as some characterize any movie that doesn't directly point the way to The Revolution. It is a generally enjoyable and pleasant film, a popcorn-eating film. But Alice provides no realistic model for women, nor does she make any strong decisions for herself. After her husband is killed, she takes off for an unrealistic Monterey with her son and her mediocre voice to be a singer. It's not the kind of act that we can be expected to admire and emulate. She never left her husband, she never confronted him, and she is freed from him only by his accidental death.

But perhaps more to the point, there is an inconsistency in Alice's character that makes her confusing and a little improbable. Burstyn's humiliations as an actress and as a middle-class woman, however recent the latter status may be, show through her totally right visual presentation of Alice: she looks the part. But either the script or her acting gets in the way. Kael sees Burstyn's history as an actress as the large factor in her performance. Kael's anger, that Burstyn had to wait for God-knows-how-long for a good role, may be the most valid response to the film. Speaking of the intense, almost speedy way Burstyn plays Alice, Kael says:

"Sometimes a person's anger and overstatement tell a bigger story than the person knows how to tell. The anger may derive from deprivation of the means to express oneself calmly, 'rationally.' People can be too angry to care about balance, while resenting everything that has unbalanced them."

The problem, however, is not only in the ferocity with which Burstyn attacks the role. There is a decidedly prim and middle class touch to it in spite of the generally working class milieu. Alice's swearing, for example, as tough tomboy style, played always for a laugh. And I can't imagine a

woman like Alice initially rejecting Flo, the all-time champ of creative cussing, as she does, although their relationship does develop into a warm and human one. But it's unbelievable that Alice is shocked and angry because of Flo's mouth rather than delighted and amazed, as the audience is.

In some ways, Alice is the Doris Day heroine, updated. There is a swing away from the ladylike virgin to the cussing sexual woman and from the 50s authoritative parent to a 70s I'm-OK-you're-OK sensibility. And the fun does provide an image which is closer to contemporary women's reality than Doris Day or than the bulk of women's roles in movies today. But Doris Day was the embodiment of a seemingly attainable ideal: a working woman, or a mother with four kids, coping with life. Maybe that's why our mothers loved her. Our affection for Alice comes from the same place: We see a woman who has experiences like our own and who is not ruined by them. But this is part of the myth—that we can cope and survive as she does and that Prince Charming is waiting.

Alice emerges from an apparently totally negative marriage relatively unscarred. Her husband responds to her only in bed and even then only after she has begun to cry because of his indifference to her. Her resiliency is admirable, but it doesn't feel real. The rest of her background is vague. What were her parents like, for example? We are only reminded of the lack here by an unnecessary little Wizard of Oz parody, which has little connection with the rest of the movie and tells us little except that Scorsese had plenty of money to spend on his route to becoming the 70s Otto Preminger.

The film is a mixture of improbable situations and reactions along with strikingly real ones. It is the real ones that give it its strength. Alice's relationship with her son, who comes off as a totally real kid, rings true. And it is this relationship which is the film's real focus. The driving scenes are bound to bring a shock of recognition to anyone who has traveled with a child: the carsickness, the "are-we-there-yet?," the long-winded and incomprehensible joke. Alice's reactions to all this pull us right in. But they are clever scenes that anyone with a sharp eye and ear could do.

The birthday scene is on another level: Alice's tension about how her son and her lover get along, her alternating her attention and anger on first one and then the other, her refusal to let them work out their relationship without her in the middle of it, as well as the absurd birthday present of a cowboy suit and the shabby party decorations—all of these elements combine to bring off the complexities of the emotions involved in a solid and useful way. Alice's relationship with Bea and Bea's fantasy of leaving her husband and kids "just like that" similarly reflect an unusual care and understanding of women and their lives. And I shudder to think how many of us recognize Ben, who exhibits warning signs of macho madness, but who charms and tricks us until all we can do is run away to keep from being sucked into it.

But what can be the point about women's position when the husband is

made to be such a blatantly villainous sort? Women can sympathize and compare their own husbands favorably: it sparks the old no-shoes versus no-feet mentality. And it gives men an easy out. They can compare themselves with two incredible brutes and congratulate themselves on their relatively low degree of inhumanity. I suspect this is a trick of men directors. Remember DIARY OF A MAD HOUSEWIFE? And then, as a bonus, we are given Kris Kristofferson, who is so nondescript in this role that one can project almost anything onto him. Kael calls him a fusion of “geniality and sexiness,” and Susan Braudy describes him as “stern, taciturn, and sexy.” We found him a little boring: the charm that he had in BLUME IN LOVE, as well as a self-sufficient strength, are gone. Nor are we particularly struck by the sincerity of his offer to give up his ranch. In point of fact, his word isn't put to the test, since Alice decides to stay in Tucson rather than continue her dreamer's journey to Monterey. So Kristofferson provides the way out for men who want to have their cake and eat it too.

The movie presents Alice with only two choices, once she has decided to move. Either she can lead the sleazy life of a lonely, untalented, aging, piano bar singer who gets knocked around by the guys she meets there, or she can settle down with a man on his ranch. Big choice.

And we're not sure but what the real story of a woman who had chosen the former would not look so dismal. The singer in CALIFORNIA SPLIT might be an example. The difference between her and Alice is mainly one of toughness. Alice is soft, vulnerable and innocent, in spite of her tough talk. The other woman is independent, on her own, and shows us more about herself, through nothing more than her singing and wisecracks, than Alice ever does. Scorsese's fancy camera spiraling around her while she sings almost glosses over the weakness here, but whatever our reaction to the scene, it stems from the camera work, lighting and editing, and from her cleverly arranged medley rather than from her character or her singing.

Part of what sits wrong in Alice's desire to be a singer is that she does not come off as someone who cares about music. Her desire to be a singer comes from the image of what a singer is, an unrealistic and romantic view of a glamorous life. She would feel like a more consistent character if she showed a little feeling for her music, tried a few improvisations, even if they were poor. Her desire to be a singer is, instead, childish and egocentric. It almost says to women, “You think you've got hidden talents? Well, you probably don't. Find a good man and settle down.”

Continuing with this silent voice of the film, it says, “Yeah, sure. There's a better life for all of you wives of brutish husbands. Pray for him to die and then find a sweet old mushy thing like Kris Kristofferson and things will look up. But take off in search of El Dorado and you're doomed to a shabby life.” Viewed in this way, the film looks like a fairly traditional all-American movie. This is an exaggeration, of course. But there is a real difference between the qualified happily-ever-after-ending of

ALICE and the dogged determination of the last Lucia in the Cuban film LUCIA. Lucia loves her husband, she loves her freedom, and she is determined to have both. The ending of LUCIA implies continuing and conscious work to be done instead of acceptance and compromise. That seems like the most likely possibility for women who want to change their lives.

But Alice is tricked, or we are tricked by the film, into thinking that she has found her better life. Could it be that women know that five years from now Alice will be like many of the other wives in Tucson, going half-mad with the contradictory frustrations, guilt, love and joy in their lives?

Alice provides neither a realistic character for women to identify with, nor does her happy ending look like a very attractive proposition to someone looking for a way out. But this film moves more in those directions than anything else that has come out of Hollywood recently, and for that it is welcome.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore Waitressing for Warner's

by Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary

from *Jump Cut*, no. 7, 1975, pp. 5-7

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PRELUDE: 1972-1975:

A PRESS CHRONOLOGY OF A MAGAZINE SUCCESS STORY

"All told, 51 per cent of the stock of *Ms.* will be held by its staff, and at least 10 per cent will go into a foundation to benefit feminist causes. The remainder is earmarked for outside investors, and the new publisher reports that 'people are literally bidding for a chance to invest.'"—"A New *Ms.* at *Ms.*," *Newsweek*, March 13, 1972, p. 50.

"The men at Warner Communications and the women at *Ms.* magazine announced yesterday that Warner will acquire a significant, but still a minority, of interest in the *Ms.* Magazine Corporation."—"Men and *Ms.*," *New York Times*, May 3, 1972, 75:5.

"Dr. Peter C. Goldmark, inventor of workable color TV, ... belongs to Warners. So does a fraction of Gloria Steinem, in whose new feminist magazine, *Ms.*, Warner invested \$1 million for its only minority interest (between 20 and 40 per cent)."—Marilyn Bender, "From Cash to Cable: Warner Communication—Metamorphosis of a Conglomerate," *Sunday New York Times*, August 13, 1972, III, 3:1.

Entry on Warner Communications, Inc.—"On May 2, 1972, company entered into an agreement with *Ms.* Magazine Corporation whereby Co. acquired 25% minority equity interest in *Ms.*, the new national magazine for women."—*Moody's Industrial Manual*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1974), p. 2594,

Independent News Co., Inc.—"The exclusive national distributor of *Ms.* and other magazines is a subsidiary of Warner Communications."—*Ibid.*

AND TODAY:

“If *Ms.* now has a range of advertising no other woman’s magazine ever dreamed of, our advertisers are enjoying success in a new market they never dreamed of ... Today in *Ms.* you can be as radical as McDonnell Douglas. Or Mobil. Or Volkswagen. Or Chevrolet, or Bristol Myers, or AT&T ... Our liberated advertisers are not so much ahead of the times as with it.”

- A full-page ad placed by *Ms.* Magazine, *New York Times*, May 8, 1975, p. 80.

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It’s a bad omen when Warner Brothers and the *Ms.* magazine sisters prove kissing corporate cousins. Realize that it was a strangely premeditated, pre-release hype review of Warners’ ALICE DOESN’T LIVE HERE ANYMORE in the January, 1975, issue which started the infernal bandwagon rolling. In the name of women everywhere *Ms.* editor Susan Braudy thanked the beneficent studio for “our movie ... a little gift from Hollywood,” the supposed masterwork of self-admitted macho director Martin Scorsese on his feminist trip.

By the time ALICE star Ellen Burstyn stepped gingerly onto the cover of the February *Ms.* (straining to appear at ease as incipient Movement Superstar), the smooth PR “correct line” on ALICE had spread to the hinterland that the movie was turning profits for Warners, and the Oscar for Ellen’s Alice was a *fait accompli*. From Canby at the *Times* to Zimmerman at *Newsweek* from Tweedledee at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* to Tweedledum at *The Washington Star*, one timid review fed into another. What good-willed critic could speak against a film so firmly committed to the women’s movement, a picture endorsed so enthusiastically by *Ms.*? ALICE was praised everywhere for its brave, unusual, original feminism and for offering actresses chances at last to express themselves in decent Hollywood roles.⁽¹⁾ As for Martin Scorsese, he set a new directorial record, bypassing even the mighty mouths of Godard-Gorin, in talking of ALICE to four film periodicals in one month: *Filmmakers Newsletter*, *Film Comment*, *Film Heritage*, and *AFI Report*.

Luckily, *The Voice* in the wilderness: Molly Haskell alone raised serious objections against ALICE in her original review, even making the heretical observation that Martin Scorsese doesn’t seem to like women very much. And lately, dissident views of ALICE have emerged in other spots. Stephen Farber, in a heated Sunday *Times* column, declared ALICE an incredibly overrated work and admonished Scorsese for slipping into softness after the forceful, honest MEAN STREETS. John Simon, ruffled and annoyed at being confronted by such a silly movie, railed against ALICE in his *Esquire* column, wondering if the precocious eleven-year-old in the cast had ghostwritten the script. He banished Scorsese to that special chamber of hell reserved for idiots and John

Cassavetes.

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The plot of ALICE is thin but not altogether unsatisfactory. A mid-thirtyish woman, Alice Hyatt (Ellen Burstyn), freshly widowed, takes her young son on a journey-search for a new existence. Along the way, she makes female friends (such as Diane Ladd) with whom she works, weeps, and exchanges sexual fantasies. And she uncovers an enlightened lover, David (Kris Kristofferson)—a Marlboro man willing to sacrifice his lazy ranch life to join Alice in *her* search for *her* career. (That's before Scorsese's retrograde conclusion, to be dealt with later on.)

But even at the comparatively pleasant moments of ALICE Scorsese's insecurity as a director works to cripple the narrative. He seems so utterly enamored of Ellen Burstyn (or perhaps intimidated by doing a "woman's story") that he allows the leading lady to do anything she wants—pout, mug, mutter, soliloquize, reminisce—and for as long as she wants. Burstyn takes full advantage, putting her whole repertoire of raw emotions on proud display. Yet without properly controlled direction (the kind Cukor gave Hepburn, for example), this woman's intuition often proves completely wrong. Her Alice is strictly a non-character—floating, undefined, inconsistent—veering this way and that, depending on Burstyn's whims in any particular scene.

Personal relationships in ALICE are likewise constructed through long and indulgent improvisations, such as the raucous, hysterical sequence in the diner: the waitresses swear, sob, and hug, dropping plates and spilling ketchup in the ecstasy of newly found camaraderie. There are too many scenes like this one, too many hugs, tears, and women under the influence, and too few quiet moments between crises when real friendships have time to develop.⁽²⁾ (A rare, still predominantly visual, moment: where Burstyn and Diane Ladd sunbathe behind dark, enigmatic glasses, look-alikes to Bergman's phantasmagoric nurse and patient of PERSONA.)

Ex-NYU movie freak Martin Scorsese obviously was tutored by the best around: the early Warners' working class dramas, with Joan Blondell and Glenda Farrell seeking employment in the face of the Depression; the old Hepburn, Dietrich, and Roz Russell vehicles, in which brassy, loudmouthed females grabbed what they wanted, be it man or job. Scorsese clearly wished to write a refrain to these 30s and 40s "Women's Pictures," but with the added touch of Today's Consciousness bringing wisdom into the events.

Yet ALICE fails on both counts. It lacks the disciplined, ensemble professionalism and the tight scripting which kept the old pictures ever entertaining. And it is so humdrum predictable and programmed in its "new" feminism that many of the earlier, more outwardly conservative films seen startlingly unorthodox in comparison. (Is there any "liberated" notion in ALICE with one hundredth the shock power of barefoot Marlene Dietrich following Gary Cooper into the desert at the

delirious end of Sternberg's MOROCCO?)

ALICE does have one distinct, although perhaps mostly unconscious, element: its structure, a remarkably consistent reordering of THE WIZARD OF OZ for the modern age, with Alice as Dorothy in need of a women's group.

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Alice wants to be a singer, something she has known since a kid. The film opens surrealistically. Young Alice walks down a Fox country road, a John Ford TOBACCO ROAD, belting an Alice Faye tune, "You'll Never Know." She is a child of the screen, a Dorothy look-alike and dress-alike, whose L. Frank Baum farmhouse is framed by an MGM ultrared Technicolor sunset.

Suddenly, a tornado-like camera movement propels Alice out of her childhood. The camera swirls high above the farm and comes down to rest in an alien time and place: modern suburbia, where the hard rock unisex of Mott the Hoople blares from the soundtrack with gale force. Glitter fey replaces Alice Faye. Our Alice is grown now, with singing career abandoned for man, marriage and child. It's the old story. She is trapped as surely as Dorothy was caught in Oz.

Alice cries herself to sleep nights. But—ding! Dong!—her husband gets dead. Alice is free. And with her son (Toto?) she sets out West on the superhighway toward Monterey—California magic—and a singing career at last. But this road is paved with neither gold nor even yellow bricks, only one-night bars and motels. Alice becomes involved with a young dude, a secretly married wife-beater, a straw man without brains, heart, or courage. And her wizard is no more a magician than his Oz counterpart. He is only Mel, who puts Alice to work in his greasy spoon Tucson diner.

But those who pine for traditional happy endings need only recall the WIZARD OF OZ's heartening conclusion. The Good Witch of the North places little lost Dorothy in a balloon. And cheered on by the munchkins, Dorothy returns at last to her peaceful Kansas home. For Scorsese, the good witch becomes a man—Alice's rancher boyfriend, David, who, in the engaging person of Kris Kristofferson's crinkly nose and bassoon voice, finally proves irresistible.

Especially when he offers Alice the perfect proposal for the budding feminist: soothing assurance, perhaps even sincere, that he would leave his own life behind to follow her. Alas, the heroic gesture proves enough. Witnessed by the festive hashery crowd, munchkins grinning in every booth, Alice agrees to marry David—and later, of her own volition, decides to remain in Tucson on his ranch—motherhood, wifedom, and home at the range.

Here's the way Marty Scorsese describes his conclusion:

.. I wanted it to end happily—I guess for my own good because I hope that people get together sometime ... Maybe, it's a wishful thing, but I have a feeling that she was the kind of character that needed men ... In ALICE, she wins, but she wins a very small thing. She wins a little understanding of herself.”(3)

Scorsese's ultimate message of “a little understanding” is the touching political program of a Hallmark greeting card, of an evening with John Denver, but hardly the serious word of a male friend to the women's movement. Much less is this the philosophy of a progressive political thinker. Scorsese says that Alice Hyatt is working class, even assigns her dirt-farmer parentage. There is no way to believe it. Burstyn's clever mannerisms, her too-cute improvisational lines, her Dewey progressive way of relating to her son, and her condescending attitude toward her work situations (and coworkers) all indicate the existence of a displaced, alienated, middle class consciousness—stuck among the masses and trying to wiggle her way out.

Her chances begin early when Alice's monosyllabic beast of a trucker husband (an incredibly revealing caricature of an U.S. worker) is killed off so that Alice can “grow” (grow more bourgeois?) and find a better match. Question: why does a wealthy rancher like Kristofferson hang around a poor waitress like Alice? Answer: because he sniffs out a hidden class ally. Just as in those fairy tales, Alice is really a disinherited princess. Properly, she bypasses two wrong suitors (her husband and Evil Ben, the stud, culprits from the lower classes) for her rightful and appropriate destiny: marriage to a gentle (and landed) nouveau riche prince. No wonder Alice says “to hell” with her singing career.

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“Women and children are always mentioned in the same breath ... [The] nature of this bond is no more than shared oppression ... The heart of woman's oppression is her ... childrearing roles. And in turn children are defined in relation to this role and are psychologically formed by it.”

“Between the two of them ... he will certainly prefer his mother. He has a bond with her in oppression ... The father, as far as the child can see, is in total control.”—Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*.

In an obscure 1949 RKO picture, HOLIDAY AFFAIR, Janet Leigh is widowed mother to a boy the age of Alice's Tommy. Their relationship is tight, sympathetic, vocal and democratic, and among the things shared is a deep and binding reverence for a dead man's photo upon the bureau. That the husband's spirit still controls becomes obvious in the sudden family tension the moment Leigh dares to contemplate a second marriage. When she wilts under her child's pressure, Leigh is lectured by one of her suitors (Robert Mitchum) for transforming her boy into a surrogate husband—a little man with full domain in choosing her lovers

and dictating her lifestyle. This accusation carries force against the entangled oedipal relationship of ALICE.

Even before widowhood, Alice is soulmate to her son, Tommy.⁽⁴⁾ They laugh at each other's jokes and form secret alliances against the mean tempered husband. Yet after the husband's death, Tommy adds to his "mother's companion" role a stern second duty. He becomes the rational voice, the person of common sense, questioning his mother on every decision and at every step of their journey. "How do you know you can make it? ... What about school? ... What about Monterey?" It's a feud between Tommy and David which precipitates Alice's temporary break with the rancher. And again, it's Tommy's wish to attend school in Tucson which allows Alice to stay on in Arizona, abandoning her life goals without feeling too guilty or compromised.

For a time it seems that Tommy, Alice, and Rancher David will get it together without a single crisis. David is charmed silly listening to Alice's interminable adolescent rememberings, a sure sign of Love the Morning After. And Alice smiles contentedly as she washes after-supper dishes while the two males practice guitar in the living room. But a fight erupts, and the engagement is forestalled for twenty-four hours of trauma and melodrama.

Where is Tommy? While Alice sweats the night, Tommy cavorts with androgyne Audrey, the hooker's daughter, who teaches the boy the fine arts of boozing and shoplifting. If the unisex and streetwise image of Audrey is exciting and subversive, a rare female leader of the pack, she is swiftly undercut by the filmmakers and revealed to be a true Bad Seed. The punishment for her, and those who foolishly follow after, is midnight in detention.

At the end of Tommy's drunken night in jail, Alice encounters weird Audrey's infamous mother, a bleached blonde caricatured prostitute in a tight, clinging green-flowered pantsuit. With this jarring example of lapsed parenthood confronting her in the night, Alice bustles Tommy out of detention. The lesson is learned. No longer can Alice be indolent or unclear in her motherly duty. Tommy must be molded into proper male adulthood—with a home, good school, and, in David, a proper male model to emulate.

With Tommy firmly in control, Alice remains in Tucson to groom and nurture him. It's the end of the road. Even a film so blissfully informed by the women's movement can discover no new alternatives for its weary and wearisome heroine.⁽⁵⁾ Motherhood—defined as the sacrifice of one's own identity for the sake of the child—is still the highest and holiest good. In 1975, Alice does live here again and again and again.

Notes:

¹ While good parts for women in Hollywood films have been indeed few and far between in recent years, they have not been so totally missing as the self-righteous ALICE fans have led others to believe. Surely some of

the actresses' roles below are worthy of consideration next to Ellen Burstyn's heralded Alice Hyatt: Raquel Welch in KANSAS CITY BOMBER and HANNIE CAULDER, Dyann Cannon in SUCH GOOD FRIENDS, Barbra Streisand in THE WAY WE WERE, Goldie Hawn in SUGARLAND EXPRESS, Jane Fonda in KLUTE and A DOLL'S HOUSE, Karen Black in AIRPORT 75, Anne Bancroft in THE PRISONER OF SECOND AVENUE, Julie Christie in DON'T LOOK NOW, Shirley MacLaine in THE POSSESSION OF JOEL DELANEY, Diana Ross in LADY SINGS THE BLUES.

[2.](#) Some people have argued with us that ALICE is one of the few U.S. movies in which women's emotions have been allowed free reign. Not true at all. "Weepies" have always contained at least as many tears and handkerchiefs on screen as in the audience—look at Joan Crawford or Katharine Hepburn in the 1930s, or the masterful Sirk melodramas of the 1950s such as ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS or IMITATION OF LIFE.

Ellen Burstyn, Lelia Goldoni, and Diane Ladd are all protégées of the Actor's Studio, which emotional acting style is the real reason for the outbursts in ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE. This picture is simply one more in a long line of Method-influenced movies with strongly emotional women's parts: STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE, THE THREE FACES OF EVE, THE MIRACLE WORKER, SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH, DUTCHMAN, THE RAIN PEOPLE, RACHEL, RACHEL, etc.

[3.](#) F. Anthony Macklin, "It's a Personal Thing with Me," *Film Heritage*, Spring, 1975, pp. 13-29. The best interview with Scorsese about ALICE, thanks to the sassy, irreverent tone of the interviewer.

[4.](#) For comparison, some other Hollywood films to anticipate Alice's story of a mother left alone with a son: BLONDE VENUS (1932, Sternberg), with Dietrich on the road, waitressing and perhaps hooking so her son can eat; THREE ON A MATCH (1933, LeRoy), with Ann Dvorak as an estranged socialite who drags her son along on her affair with a racketeer; LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN (1948, Ophuls), with Joan Fontaine abandoning her son and marriage to pursue the great love of her life; HOLIDAY AFFAIR (1949, Hartman), with Janet Leigh, like Alice, treating her son as a tiny adult and letting him dictate her romances; CINDERELLA LIBERTY (1974, Rydell), with Marsha Mason as a white prostitute lush with a heart of gold and a black, delinquent child.

[5.](#) And a special plea for one great movie: Douglas Sirk's TARNISHED ANGELS (1957), based on William Faulkner's Depression novel of the Mardi Gras, *Pylon*. At the film's center is Laverne (a bittersweet, beautiful Dorothy Malone)—parachute jumper, mother of a school-age boy, and alienated wife to Roger (Robert Stack), the anguished lead performer in the barnstorming Shumann Flying Circus.

Like Alice, Laverne sought escape from the farm through a glorious entertainment, career. But she found herself instead reduced to an

unanticipated sex object on the job and a sexless wife off it, caught in a marriage of mistrust and misperception. Despite his love, Roger will prostitute her for the price of an airplane. She, hungry for affection, flirts with adultery with an over-anxious newspaperman (Rock Hudson). When Roger is killed in a plane crash, Laverne is left alone to fend for herself and her son in an environment of men vying for her sexual attentions.

Nothing bears resemblance to ALICE except the plot elements. The super-intelligent handling of this truly adult love story, the sensitive and dignified interplay of mother and child, mother and father, mother and suitors, the remarkable literary script, and Sirk's controlled poetic visual style (black-and-white Cinemascope) seem striking contrasts to Scorsese's intuitive cinematic ramblings. It is TARNISHED ANGELS which should be revived, to serve as paradigm of movies about women left alone with children. And it is Douglas Sirk who should be honored as a truly worthy women's director.

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The Middle of the World The long road to liberation

by Ying Ying Wu

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In recent years there have been few major film roles for women and few serious films dealing with women coping with the pressures of modern life. Complaints from feminists have inspired several films which have attempted to fill this gap. Despite the current influence of women's liberation, many producers, writers and directors still seem unable to visualize their heroines as more than unhappy women victimized by their families and acquaintances, their economic situations, and most important, their own sense of inadequacy. Ending a film by implying that a woman's only option is to live happily or unhappily ever after with the man of her choice merely propagates a defeatist attitude.

Swiss director Alain Tanner is one of the few who prefer to offer audiences the possibility of an independent heroine capable of fighting to establish her identity. In 1971 he founded his international reputation with *THE SALAMANDER*, the portrait of Rosemonde, a young working class woman who drifts from job to job with charming nonchalance. Tanner not only draws us into the story of two writers' hilarious research for a TV script into Rosemonde's alleged attempt to shoot her uncle and the writers' inadvertent sexual involvement with her, but he also explores the gum-chewing factory worker's rebellion against her oppressive life.

On a political level, Tanner shows Rosemonde educating the middle class writers, Paul and Pierre (played by Tanner regulars Jacques Denis and Jean-Luc Bideau) about proletarian life by contradicting all their assumptions about her. Unconsciously, yet naturally, her revolt extends to society's limited concept of her as a female. Rosemonde (portrayed by a spunky Bulle Ogier) resists boredom—whether from her jobs or from her men—in a series of random, humorous incidents. Tanner's genius lies in his protest of her dual, inseparable oppression as a sex object and as a victim of dehumanized, industrial society by elevating it to high farce. Stuffing sausages into casings at the factory takes on sexual innuendoes, as does her disconcerting habit of caressing customers' feet

in a short-lived stint as a shoe clerk. Her pranks against complacent employers and her cool indifference to lovers are a reaction against being desensitized by society.

This non-conformism usually gets her into trouble, yet Rosemonde always emerges with her individuality intact. From this we derive the meaning of the film's title, describing a mythical lizard-like creature which can endure fire without harm. Rosemonde's instinct for survival allows her to walk away from her daily skirmishes unscathed. We remain confident that these skirmishes, defined by her depressing working class milieu, are shaping Rosemonde into a stronger, wiser woman, even if she's headed toward an uncertain future.

Tanner's other efforts deal with similar rebellions against modern industrialized society by a successful Swiss businessman/ watchmaker (CHARLES DEAD OR ALIVE, 1969) and a young middle class couple in Geneva who long to join the Third World in preparing for the revolution (RETURN FROM AFRICA, 1973). But his latest film, and his first in color, THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD (1974), again examining a working class woman's life, firmly establishes him as a leading male commentator of this decade on women's liberation by capturing the essence of the struggle between the sexes in terms previously unexplored on film.

One of the secondary themes of RETURN FROM AFRICA explores Françoise's contact with working-class women through her job at the post office. Now that she and her husband have decided to remain in Switzerland and to fight for social changes at home, she gradually realizes her role in improving her co-workers' lives and its effect on her own existence. Like Rosemonde, Françoise's revolt appears instinctive and undirected at first, but Tanner reveals that it is in fact directed against certain oppressive elements in society. Thus while exploring his characters' relations with each other, he makes sure to place these into a political context. Never allowing his audience to lose sight of the characters' socioeconomic backgrounds, he reveals how these color their behavior. Françoise, and especially Rosemonde, blaze the trail for Adriana, a woman who "doesn't know what she wants, but does know what she doesn't want."

The point of departure of THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD is a potentially banal love story between Paul, a married Swiss engineer, and Adriana, an Italian emigrant waitress. As in Truffaut's THE SOFT SKIN, mutual attraction develops into a destructive, lopsided passion which ruins Paul's chances of being elected to political office. Co-scripted with English art critic and novelist John Berger, who collaborated on THE SALAMANDER and RETURN FROM AFRICA, this film employs their now familiar reflective tone and carefully modulated mood shifts to examine characters caught within social forces which they refuse to accept. Though he also diverts our preoccupation with the plot to his affection and concern for Paul and Adriana, Tanner's use of incisive details and characterization goes one step beyond Truffaut's. The

former's involvement with the problems of illicit lovers is interlocked with his class-conscious view of them.

At the beginning, the narrator informs us that the film demonstrates the concept of "normalization" in which relations between the economic classes, different countries or the sexes are acceptable "as long as nothing changes."

At the film's end, Adriana leaves Paul, her job and her friends. What the film examines are the options she has abandoned and the reasons for her conscious choice to refuse them. Tanner's concept of a heroine who is capable of making these choices is refreshing.

Philippe Leotard skillfully and subtly presents Paul as an attractive and basically sympathetic lover. A self-made man with wife and child, Paul is the very personification of bourgeois values demanded by the backers of his political party. His embarking on a political career signifies the level of success he has achieved. Yet we observe him nervously approaching Adriana and wooing her with a deference which indicates that he is also a novice at adultery.

In the initial stages of their affair, he, a native of the region, explains local customs to Adriana during their strolls around the countryside. Born on a farm, Paul never denies his peasant roots and retains his closeness to the land and to his farmer father.

Tanner's indictment of Paul unfolds slowly. As his relationship with Adriana becomes more intense, through several meetings which convey an urgent, tender eroticism not often seen in films, he begins to envisage their future together.

Inevitably Paul considers plans to divorce his wife, take Adriana on trips, and rent an apartment so they can live together. In short, to build a life for himself which will only be a replica of the old. And in doing so, to rescue Adriana from what he refers to as her "shitty job" and modest rented room, ideas which provoke her angry retort, "And what will I do all day long? He assures her, "You'll be free to do anything you want—with me."

A friend described Paul as "unconvincing" because he was so willing to risk both family and career for Adriana's sake. It is unsettling, I admit, to observe for once a man who is so completely overwhelmed by his passions that he sacrifices everything he has built up during his life for love. That's a film role usually reserved for women.

There is also a curious contradiction about a man who is so ready to take these risks and yet who is so securely anchored to his bourgeois values that he can only try to impose these same values on Adriana. On the one hand, he takes more risks than are believable to reject these values. Yet he is trying to bring Adriana into a lifestyle defined by the very stifling values he has rejected. Even at the end, Paul doesn't realize that his selfish, paradoxical behavior has destroyed their affair.

Adriana, on the other hand, is a revelation. As characterized by Olimpia Carlisi, she is a combination of quiet dignity and determination. She also reacts to predictable situations in unexpected ways. Arguments about labor unions sum up her family life in Italy and attest to her working-class roots, yet she doesn't seem gratified by Paul's generous offers to free her from them. When they go to spend the night in a posh hotel where he reveals (not without a trace of pride in his voice) that, as a struggling student, he couldn't afford the price of a lemonade, she demands to go home to sleep in her own bed. Presenting her with a costly movie camera, he is disappointed that Adriana has no interest in making films about her monotonous life, or as she puts it, "dogs taking a piss." Paul finally takes her to his own home and proudly lists its modern conveniences: washing machine, freezer, electric mixer, etc. This prompts Adriana to get right back into his car and refuse to enter the house.

The disintegration of their relationship is clear to her. Adriana realizes that they can only really communicate on a physical level. She draws Paul's attention to this and to his unwitting treatment of her as a sexual object in a sad bedroom scene. Undressing only below the waist, she mechanically beckons Paul to bed, evoking his confused reply, "That's the way the whores do it."

His ignorance of Adriana's needs extends to his doomed political campaign. By now, Paul's affair has jeopardized not only his marriage but his political future. The snickering, envious references to Adriana as a "hot lay" by everyone around him—from garage mechanics (including an ebullient Jacques Denis who kids him knowingly) to his alarmed colleagues—crassly echo this truth. Paul remains stubbornly oblivious and maintains to his backers that his private life is nobody's business but his own. Yet his scandalous behavior provides juicy gossip for the local populace who correctly predict that it will cause him to lose the election.

They are especially intolerant of his making a fool of himself over an emigrant worker. The film's title, *THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD*, refers to the geographical and psychological division in Switzerland between northern and southern Europe. And although Paul recognizes no problems arising from their different nationalities, his neighbors refer to Adriana contemptuously as "that Italian," as they do of Italian laborers in general.

Adriana's friend and coworker Juliette, although incapable of understanding Adriana's involvement with Paul, is nonetheless sympathetic. Juliet Berto enlivens this supporting role with a marvelous mixture of humor and cynicism. As both victim and victor of the sexual revolution, she reflects her own lifestyle. Although Juliette professes to enjoy the freedom of going out with different men and dreads marriage as only another form of enslavement, a husband would provide an escape from her dreary job. She observes resignedly, "You can't party forever." At the film's end, Adriana is leaving for Zurich and the pair are

waiting at the train station. With disarming innocence, Juliette questions her friend's reasons for leaving. Was it to save Paul's career? Was she paid to leave? Was Paul lousy in bed? Did Paul want to have "abnormal sex"? Was it because Paul wasn't Italian? Adriana shakes her head and smiles no.

Rather, Tanner suggests that Adriana's departure is motivated by her realization that Paul's desires cannot change. Nor can she change as he wants her to. In effect, they have become "normalized."

Tanner's unromantic style of depicting random moments during their 112 days together emphasizes the ordinary quality of their affair and the inevitability of its breakdown. From the beginning, Adriana possesses an instinctive sense of what her life will be like and is preoccupied with making her own choices about its direction. Becoming a middle class housewife is not part of her plan. Paul's persistent blindness to her real desires has hastened the failure of their relationship. When he offers to have a facial scar removed which Adriana received in a fire, his motives seem entirely unselfish. What he overlooks is that Adriana cherishes this scar as a reminder of her realization that her primary responsibility in life is to herself, a credo she has tried to live up to since then.

At the end, when we leave Adriana working in a Zurich factory, an ironic glimpse of a supervisor who is almost Paul's double suggests that she could just as well have been involved with this fellow. But we are now sure that she will not capitulate to the dehumanization of her new job. We also feel certain that what she has learned about her limitations in her relationship with Paul has brought her further along the road to self-knowledge. Tanner clearly implies throughout the film that these limitations are imposed as much by society's definition of her as by the boundaries of her emotions toward Paul.

Tanner's films demand to be seen again and again. Because his characters interact with each other on several levels, you continue to think about them long after you've seen the film. He is concerned with opening his audiences' eyes and eliciting a kind of enlightenment—both social and political—necessary for changing our conception of the female experience. This demands we actively evaluate his characters. Thus Tanner is to be praised for refusing to impose on his films clear, emotionally satisfying endings. Like Rosemonde and Françoise, he leaves Adriana's future open and ambiguous. Only what we have individually learned about her provides a clue to what she will do.

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Chac

The making of a “Mayan” movie?

by Sheldon H. Davis

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“Indians are like the weather. Everyone knows all about the weather, but none can change it. When storms are predicted, the sun shines. When picnic weather is announced, the rain begins ... Because people can see right through us, it becomes impossible to tell truth from fiction or fact from mythology ... The more we try to be ourselves the more we are forced to defend what we have never been ...”—Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins*

I saw Chilean filmmaker Rolando Klein’s CHAC at the Pacific Film Archive on Wednesday, April 2, in what was billed as the film’s first Bay Area showing. Even before seeing the film, I was anxious to know what it was about. I had spent two years in a Mayan Indian community in Guatemala, which was similar to the Mexican village of Tenejapa where CHAC was filmed, and was teaching a course at Laney College in Oakland on the social and cultural history of the Maya. Also, over the past two years I have been co-director of an organization called INDIGENA ([1](#)) (the Spanish word for Native American), and hence CHAC was a film which I thought I should see.

During the week previous to seeing the film I learned two things about CHAC. The first piece of information came from the program notes of the Pacific Film Archive and is worth quoting in full:

“This extraordinary first feature by a Chilean filmmaker (graduated from the UCLA Film school) working with Panamanian money in Mexico has been the unexpected “find” of the year for Film Festival organizers and critic-talent scouts. Its World Premiere took place on March 21 at the Los Angeles Film Exposition, where Richard Whitehall wrote: “mysterious in its metaphysics and magic, CHAC has certain resemblances to the films of Alexander Jodorowsky. But the ritualized form of the quest, an odyssey, in which the

film is cast is closer in spirit to the works of Carlos Castaneda. CHAC (the God of rain in Mayan myth) is incantation, spell, simple and direct in its content, elegiac in its imagery, complex in its form. Its theme, ostensibly, is of a search for a rainmaker capable of placating the Gods and bringing rain to a drought stricken village ... Beautifully made and finely acted by a group of presumably nonprofessional Indian villagers (since the supply of Tzeltal-speaking actors must be severely limited), there is a timeless, legendary quality to the work that makes it one of the most fascinating of recent films ...”

CHAC, I also learned, had been selected for showing by Filmex in Los Angeles, the New Director’s Series at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Directors’ Fortnight at the Cannes Festival.

My second piece of information came from an article which appeared in the *Berkley Barb* (3/28/75), a review titled “Making a Mayan Movie,” written also by a Chilean, Hans Ehrmann, just a couple of days before its showing at the Pacific Film Archives. Ehrmann provided a great deal of background to the filming of CHAC although there was no discussion or criticism of the film as such.

Ehrmann points out that the Tzeltal-speaking actors in the film had all come from the village of Tenejapa in Chiapas, Mexico, and that they had been recruited by Klein by talking to people in the marketplace. Despite attempts by the director and his crew to establish friendly relations with the Indian community, however, labor problems were a significant factor in making the film. Wages paid to the Indian actors were initially set at two and a half dollars per day, but then, following protest and negotiations, were raised to four dollars, plus meals, per day. Ehrmann wrote, “Financial discussions, ... were friendly, but did not prevent three strikes by the cast.” Further, Ehrmann described how numerous film technicians swarmed upon the isolated Indian village (23 technicians were forced upon Klein and his crew by the Mexican film union). He also described other nasty incidents which occurred: Pablo Canche Balan, the main actor, accidentally slipped 100 feet in the filming of one scene in a cave. A group of actors rented a bus and attempted to escape from the project in a sequence shot in Comitán. And part of the crew nearly drowned when a canoe overturned in a scene shot in the Chiapas jungles. The making of the film, in other words, was no fiesta for the Indian actors involved.

On the other hand, Ehrmann did point out that the director did have some sensitivity to the problems posed by his own intervention, as a non-Indian filmmaker, into the community. Klein was quoted as saying,

“I realized how life here [in Tenejapa] would change with a fast, instantaneous, painful blow, like birth. The technical evolution that took Europe 3,000 years and the urban parts of Latin America four centuries, would be accomplished here in the course of a generation.”

”.. If I could only have made the film following the Indians’ rhythm of life. Unfortunately, to make a film is so expensive [\$300,000 for CHAC] that we had to do the exact opposite, always trying to speed things as much as possible.”

Perhaps, I thought, the director’s sensitivity would surmount the social problems which the film created for the people of Tenejapa. However, I felt tense in the moments before CHAC was shown, and that tension grew as I began to view the film. The plot of the film was easy enough to follow. An Indian village in the Chiapas highlands is without rain. The local elders are unable to produce rain. A hermit-prophet is found in the mountains. The prophet takes the villagers to the jungle. The hermit-prophet returns to the village and holds a rain ceremony. There is no rain. Finally, the disgusted villagers go in search of the hermit-prophet and assassinate him. They throw his body into a huge ravine with a lake below, and then they return to their village where, at last, it rains.

Interspersed with this rather simple story are other themes: A deeply pensive, mute Indian boy becomes ill near the end of the film and accompanies the villagers on their quest with the prophet. A younger Indian is skeptical of the powers of traditional religion and intrigued by the technology (represented by his possession of a flashlight) of the non-Indian world. A semi-political dispute arises between the village cacique (Indian political leader) and the hermit-prophet. The highland Indians visit the jungle-dwelling Lacandon peoples. A surrealistically created dream depicts one of the Indians encountering what looks like a midget or a priest (perhaps both) hiding in a tree at night. There are various scenes of anxious Indian women waiting for their men to return from the quest, etc.

Similarly, the film has a certain beauty in the film, which goes along with its simple plot: the faces of the people as if carved from stone, their feet digging into the earth as they climbed the mountains, their religiosity and spirituality, their sense of collective destiny in the face of a natural threat. All of them affected me. Yet I still felt tension, as if something was deeply wrong and deceptive about CHAC.

What was that tension about, why those feelings inside? I believe they had to do with the falseness of CHAC, the technology of the film, the presence of the filmmaker editing his film in the laboratory and creating something which was supposed to be real, beautiful, human, and spiritual, but which in the end, like the mist in the Chiapas Highlands, went through your fingers and wasn’t ever there.

I speak a Mayan language similar to Tzeltal and immediately was aware that the Indians’ dialogue didn’t match the film’s subtitles. Many times, they were making comments with stern, serious faces which were just jokes between themselves. Further, I knew the Mayans were a very comic and joyful people, and this human quality (that of peasant, working, and Indian peoples throughout the world) just never came through in the movie. When the Maya walk up hills, for example, they

play practical jokes on each other, they gossip, they compare people to animals and are fond of making comments about the bestial aspects of sex, they talk about every conceivable topic and generally they try, like all real people, to pass the time. Even when they have ceremonies (many of which I have attended), there is a sense of the comic and the absurd. It is an element which keeps the people together and which is needed for the passage of even sacred and ceremonial time.

Initially, it should be noted, Klein had a difficult time recruiting the Indian actors because, as they put it, how could they be actors when many of them didn't know how to sing or dance or play the guitar? Where, I thought, was the music (guitars, harps, flutes, drums, chants, poetry, etc.) which was and is so much a part of Mayan life?

Most important, there was scene after scene in CHAC which appeared to have been created by the filmmaker and which never would have taken place in Mayan life. The shots of barren, unproductive, drought-ridden hills, for example, were not taken in Tenejapa but further to the south in Comitán, where no Mayan Indians live. Similarly, shots of the Tzeltal visiting the Lacandon Indians (who were smoking store-bought rather than native cigars) would have never occurred in actual life. All of the highland Indians fear the Lacandon people in the jungles. It forms a basic part of their oral traditions, legends and myths. Finally, in Maya society I knew there was no such thing as a hermit living alone on top of a hill. Amongst the Maya, if you are a holy man, you live in a community just like everyone else.

During the discussion following the film Rolando Klein was present, and it became clear to me that my tensions were legitimate ones. Klein, I believe, was trying to “put on” both me and the rest of the audience through the creation of a grossly inaccurate and vulgar movie that had been passed off by the “film festival organizers and critic-talent scouts” as a film of extraordinary and monumental scope. CHAC, like American advertising and slick Hollywood films, was a deception and a lie. Taking the highest deity in the Mayan Pantheon (rather like calling a film “Jesus Christ,” “Buddha” or “Shiva”) as its title is enough to lead one to ask questions about why this film was ever made.

The issue, I think, boils down to this: CHAC is neither a piece of “ethnographic documentation” nor a “science fiction” film but a very deceptive combination of both. On the ethnographic side, Klein admits that the film wasn't intended to portray Mayan culture or religious values in an anthropological or historical sense. The story, he admits, was created by himself and has no resemblance to any actual myth, legend or historical event. Yet, Klein uses a series of cinematographic techniques which create the impression that he is dealing with a cultural, historic, or mythic “reality.” He opens the film with a quote from the *Popol Vuh* (the Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya). He uses Tzeltal as the language of the film. He places poorly done Mayan glyph signs in the corner of the film. He takes out every aspect of Western material culture, beside a flashlight and rifles, from the set. He includes

elements of Mayan ceremonials, which “look like” the real thing, but which have very little to do with ancient or contemporary Mayan ceremonial life. In the end, the viewer thinks that he or she is seeing “something” about the Maya, but actually that “something” is a figment of director Klein’s mind. The film isn’t ethnographic documentation although it gives the impression of being such.

The same can be said about the film’s “science fiction” quality. In two very important scenes (the walking of the hermit-prophet and the villagers over a waterfall and the levitation of the hermit-prophet over the village while in the rain ceremony) Klein shows himself to be at least familiar with the usual technological methods of the science fiction film. Yet, the film isn’t science fiction. The viewer isn’t taken into outer space or into some fantasy world of the year 2001. He or she is in highland Chiapas, seeing Mayan Indians walking on waterfalls and Mayan spiritual leaders leaving the earth. This is the deception—for how can these Indians be so beautiful and spiritual (i.e., so close to the earth and land) and yet on film be able to do things like creatures out of a science fiction script? Are we to believe, perhaps, that they come from another planet, as the people in Eric Von Däniken’s *Chariot of the Gods or Gods from Outer Space*?

In the discussion following the Berkeley showing of CHAC, Klein claimed that he was trying to make a film which reflected what he termed the “pre-scientific” consciousness of the Mayans. By asserting this idea, I believe, he was trying to tell his audience that the film was really like Carlos Castaneda’s forays into the “mind” of the Yaqui holy man Don Juan. Again, this seemed to me to have been a trick, a trick of the advertising agent, rather than a truthful statement by a concerned and critical artist.

First, to pass the Maya off as “pre-scientific” is a gross falsification and absurdity. The Maya created a complex (still to be deciphered) mathematics, discovered the concept of the zero, had a sophisticated knowledge of astronomy, were aware of the medical value of acupuncture, and produced an architecture which was on the level of any “scientific” civilization in the Old, New, or Eastern World of its own time. They were the American continent’s “scientists par excellence.” Even today Mayan Indians are empirical in their ways of thinking about nature, work, the human body and the world. To call them “pre-scientific” (harking back to racist notions about “lobotomized”/ “pre-logical primitives”) shows the shallowness of Klein’s knowledge of the Maya, their cosmology, values and ways of life.

Second, to compare his own work to Castaneda’s is also deceptive. If anything, the value of Castaneda’s trilogy was that throughout it the author questioned the spuriousness of his own culture, the ways in which his own training and perception made it impossible to penetrate the depth of Don Juan’s knowledge, world and thought. Klein does the exact opposite of this. Rather than “control” (or even discuss) his own worldview (which is essentially that of a very technologically trained

filmmaker) in the course of the film (as I believe Castaneda, would have done), he “uses” his technology and own perspective to “interpret” and “manipulate” Mayan peoples and symbols in order to produce an effect. The comparison between Castaneda and Klein is absurd.

So why did Klein make this film? My impression is that he, and his sponsors, are interested in cashing in on a market both in this country and in Latin America. Perhaps I am wrong, for I am told that Klein is the son of a wealthy (anti-Allende) Chilean mine owner. Maybe he could afford the \$300,000 for the making of a serious “film of art.” The money for the film, however, is said to have come from Panama, and Todd-AO is mentioned in its acknowledgements. I would predict that this film will soon be a commercial success. Having been done in Mayan, and already translated (sic) into English, it presents little problem for wide distribution throughout the hemisphere and the capitalist, film-distributing world. Further, there is a market for this stuff both in the United States and in a commercially produced and exported “youth-drug-electric rock” culture which is now emerging in the cities of Latin America. What better thing for middle and upper class Latin American kids to do than get “spaced out” on the large Indian populations in their midst?

Most insidious, I believe, the production of CHAC represents a new phase in the film industry’s exploitation of Indian people. It is no longer possible to make a film in the genre of the old “Cowboy/ Indian/ U.S. Cavalry” films of the past. Young Indians would picket the theaters, and youths can no longer accept the image of Indians as “savages” before the advance of “Western civilization” in their midst. So now, the films will be made in South America, using Indian communities such as Tenejapa for the set and actors, and capitalizing on the image of the Indian as a “mystic creature from outer space.” Indian peoples’ real life and death situations (poverty, wretchedness, exploitation and racism) will continue to be overlooked, and more films will be made in the genre of CHAC.

One final comment on this “Mayan” movie. There’s one scene (rather like a Greek festival) where all of the Indians are carrying firewood (tumplines attached to their foreheads and down their backs) down to the village in preparation for the rain ceremony of the hermit-prophet. The supply of firewood is enormous and is burnt during the ceremony, held at sunset. For those who don’t know, the really scarce resource (besides land, which, had been taken by surrounding non-Indian hacienda owners) in highland Chiapas is firewood, rather than water. That Klein could have destroyed so much of this firewood in the filming of this scene (no matter how much or little he paid the people of Tenejapa) is gross beyond belief. Indian children in communities such as Tenejapa die because there is no firewood to heat them in the cold, rainy nights. Knowing this, I cringed inside when the first comment I heard following CHAC was “beautiful, just a beautiful movie.”

Notes:

[1.](#) INDIGENA is an information and documentation center on the Indian peoples of the Americas. The quarterly *INDIGENA Newsletter* can be obtained by writing: P.O. Box 4073, Berkeley, California 94704.

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Westworld Fantasy and exploitation

by Gerald Mead and Sam Applebaum

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“I’ve always acted alone. Americans admire the cowboy leading the caravan alone astride his horse, the cowboy entering a village or city alone on his horse. He acts, that’s all: aiming at the right spot at the right time.”—*Time* magazine, September 3, 1973, quoting Henry Kissinger’s remarks to Oriana Fallaci.

Most science fiction films tend to disguise, and thereby reveal more schematically, the present’s social or psychological preoccupations. That is what Michael Crichton attempted in his two books, *The Andromeda Strain* and *The Terminal Man*, and that is what he undertook in *WESTWORLD*, his first directorial effort. Here again his subjects are the fears and fantasies of the U.S. psyche. Unlike the two novels’ sometimes ambiguous irony, however, *WESTWORLD* develops an explicit moral perspective.

Although the film does not dismiss or even question the existence of fantasies, it does attempt to point out the dangers of a certain type of fantasy. More directly, the film criticizes the commercial exploitation and the technological dependence through which these fantasies and desires are or might be gratified. Its analysis, however, is confused. The solution it offers is at best misleading. The problem is not so much one of the filmic materials or structures but, as we shall attempt to point out, the ways in which they are used and the conclusions to which they are forced to lead.

WESTWORLD opens with an advertisement for a vacation at a unique resort. For \$1,000 a day a guest is invited to live out his or her fantasies in one of three made-to-order dream spots: “Romanworld,” a re-creation of the images of decadence and sensualism of a villa in Pompeii; “Medieval world,” a vision of romance, intrigue and rivalry set in a 13th Century English castle; and “Westworld,” the realization of an imaginary western U.S. town of the late 19th Century, including bar,

bordello, boarding house, and bank. The inhabitants of these fantasy worlds—slaves, knights, wenches, barmaids, gunslingers, and even horses and snakes—are all marvelously real robots, watched over, repaired, and recharged nightly by a crew of underground scientists and computer technicians. The robots are controlled with a kind of programmed spontaneity to respond “authentically” and satisfyingly to the anticipated desires of the guests. The film follows mainly the activities of two such guests, John Blane (James Brolin) and Peter Martin (Richard Benjamin), who, after some initial self-conscious hesitations, soon learn to indulge fully in Westworld’s pleasures. Cuts to the villa and the castle reveal that the other guests have also adjusted to their materialized desires.

Crichton’s perspective on the spectacle is external and critical at this point. He shows that the fantasies the guests at Westworld are urged to act out are foolish and often degrading stereotypes of human dream life. They are petrified images of childhood desires—cowboys, knights, Roman or medieval beauties—animated by impunious destruction and sexual assault. The victims of these objectifications, however, are not real persons being treated as objects (sex objects, aggression objects, authority objects, etc.), but mere things (robots, in fact) cast in the role of human beings treated as objects. They only *appear* to be real, living persons.

This deception forms the basic structure of Crichton’s ironic commentary on the current state of society’s efforts to pander to and to realize such stereotyped views of the human psyche. We want to realize them without recognizing or facing them for what they are. The viewer is kept more conscious of the illusionary nature of these realizations through frequent cuts to the video monitoring and technical jargon of the computer control room. The control room scenes reveal not only the guests’ willing self-deception, but also the consumer research and programming that form the real controlling forces behind guests’ “spontaneous actions.

By developing this double point of view—“Westworld” as seen by the guests and “Westworld” as seen by the programmers and technicians—Crichton expands his critical view. As the guests sleep, we see the victims and debris of their day’s fun carefully gathered up by workmen in white coveralls, to be resuscitated and restored in an assembly line operating room. This is so that by morning yesterday’s barroom brawl has been erased, and the same gunslinger or tempting lady can swagger down the street as new victims for the day’s activities. Obviously, Crichton here is deploring the extravagant use of science and human skill and effort to create a childish and not even very imaginative playground for adult self-indulgence. And, at the same time, he is exposing the profit making impulses behind certain kinds of scientific exploitation of human prejudices or weaknesses.

But is he making a more subtle, more penetrating comment as well? Does the destruction-restoration sequence which characterizes the day

and night cycle at “Westworld” call into question the all too familiar notion that U.S. technology, backed up by seemingly unlimited economic resources, can totally restore or even erase the most violent acts of cruelty, waste, and destruction? Such, at least, are the implications of these scenes. They are echoed by various other instances of the dual perspective in the film. But this commentary on U.S. moral strategy and policy, if indeed it is a criticism, remains only latent, overshadowed by the dominant dramatic conflict of the film.

WESTWORLD’s operational structure—the gratification of base fantasies for fun and profit—occupies nearly the whole first half of the film. But that is only background material, an exposition to the drama that lies ahead. It is in the dramatic struggle and its outcome that Crichton’s moral voice becomes obvious and explicit. It’s no surprise to anyone, except the characters in the story, that the resort’s reassuring slogan, “. . . where nothing can possibly go wrong,” becomes a terrifying irony. The complications begin with an unexplained increase in instances of “central malfunction” in some of the robots, a breakdown the resort directors do not consider serious until a few of the robots refuse to respond “logically” and begin to function *naturally*: A rattlesnake strikes and wounds a visitor. A programmed peasant maid refuses the advances of a repulsive would-be seducer. The gunslinger outdraws and kills a clumsy human challenger. Efforts to shut down prove useless and the “dream” turns to “nightmare.” Guest after guest is destroyed in the holocaust of machines gone haywire.

Is this the price people are to pay for the commercial gratification of their media-induced desires and fantasies? That is the scary spectacle Crichton puts on the screen, like so many science fiction moralists before him. His is more credible, perhaps, because Disneyland and Bibleworld do exist. And computer errors and machine breakdowns are real. Here it is more frightening, perhaps, because the machines look and act like humans. Crichton’s solution, too, follows the rules of the genre: When the robots who are programmed to satisfy the anticipated desires break down and begin to attack the guests, when the dream turns to nightmare and the illusion becomes real, it is up to people to fight back. It is up to Richard Benjamin, the last human alive at the resort, to avenge his friend’s death and that of all the other humans by destroying the human simulacrum, Yul Brynner, the robot gunslinger gone mad, who is now intent on killing instead of being killed.

The last half of the film follows this drama. Benjamin tries first to escape the gunslinger and then, when that proves impossible, to destroy him, first with bullets, then with acid, and finally, strength and will nearly exhausted, by burning him “to death.” (The published script calls for the gunslinger to be “literally pulled apart” on a medieval rack, but this sequence, along with a number of others, have been changed or deleted in the screen version.) The film ends with a close up of the bewildered but triumphant hero sitting on some steps near the robot’s charred remains while an off-screen voice ironically echoes the opening advertisement for “Westworld,” “. . . where nothing can possibly go

wrong.”

What we are to understand seems clear: Machines and technology pose a potential threat to people, they can and do become our “enemy.” Therefore, in order to protect ourselves from this threat, each of us must be on our guard against the invasion of plastic, mechanical, electronic culture. Each of us must heroically assert his or her fundamental “humanness” for simple survival in the face of the disguised alien force. The attitude here is no different from countless other science fiction films where scientific experimentation or expertise is shown to result inevitably in the release of forces determined to annihilate humankind. One has only to think of GODZILLA, RODAN, ON THE BEACH, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, etc., where atomic energy is identified with evil. Here, as in those examples, the distinction “human”/ “nonhuman” (monster, machine, scientific device) is shown as an antagonistic opposition, leading naturally to a death struggle.

The difference is that Crichton’s film does not delete or even naturalize the reality behind the myth: the source of the antagonism in WESTWORLD is clear. The problem is that Crichton does nothing with this perception. Rather, he uses it as a simple ironic commentary, ignoring its analytic or critical value. It is clear, for example, from the opening shot, that the very existence of the “Westworld” complex is the result of a conscious human decision to exploit men and women—and the reasons for that particular style of exploitation are irrelevant. And it is even clearer that the decision to keep “Westworld” open, even after some potentially dangerous malfunctions are recognized, is made in the interest of the economic health of the organization, the corporation.

Yet Crichton seems to use this structure simply as an ironic point of view to reveal the guests’ naiveté. In the end, the directors, programmers, and technicians are themselves, along with the guests, “innocent” victims of an inexplicable robot disease, a kind of “natural” epidemic (an “unpredictable,” mass short-circuit or an “act of God”). In other words, initially we are given a basis for understanding the economic sources of the human/ machine conflict. In the end, however, this proves to be a simple inoculation, the admission of a small wrong. The original explanation becomes insignificant as the distinction between human and machine is deformed to lead away from an economically motivated conflict and into a dramatized natural antagonism. The drama turns on “good” person versus “evil” machine. The result is that WESTWORLD ends up by reinforcing the same myth and endorsing the same ideology as these other films: Technology is the enemy of humanity. If humanity is destroyed, it is the fault of each individual for not having fought hard enough against the common enemy. We are left in the position of the punch press operator who is beating his machine with a wrench while cursing its designer for his fatigue and anger. And we have no opportunity to step out of this ideological structure to consider the possibility of men and women using science or machines to better their lives. Crichton’s film turns out to be an exploitation rather than an illumination of the human/ machine distinction, an exploitation of

conflict and fear.

The human/ machine conflict is compounded because the machine in WESTWORLD is a human simulacrum, robot look-alikes and act-alikes. This relation, which is the film's single most constant statement, is also the source of the viewer's attitude—whether it be fear, horror, or indignation—as well as the basis for the moral triumph which concludes the story. The simplest expression of the relation is provided by the characters themselves, by Richard Benjamin's innocent curiosity, "How many of them are, uh ...?" and by his inability to distinguish, right up to the end of the film, between human and robot. At one point, in fact, he himself is mistaken by a technician for a robot. The viewer, of course, inasmuch as he or she enters into the fictional world of the film, shares this curiosity and confusion although to a lesser degree because of the ironic crosscutting to the technician's point of view. Imposed on the human/ machine conflict, then, is a second structure: human versus "human" machine. This opposition, because of the similarity of its opposing terms, frequently disappears—you can't tell the humans from the "non-humans—dissolving along with itself the human/machine conflict or opposition. We, characters and spectators, are given signs by which to recognize the non-humans, some of them obvious but unexplained: There is a prominent ridging at the finger joints, which, according to the script, "gives the whole thing away." We see frequent shots of the robots' "expressionless" eyes (due to one-way contact lenses). And there are other simply obvious signs, such as the total submission to the clichés of the guests' imagination and desires. But because of the nature of the opposition and the dynamics in which these signs are involved, they represent, in reality, signs of a human relationship.

Although the identity question is posed in terms of a robot/ human opposition, it functions, both for the guests and for the viewer, as a strictly human question. The film's images and events, which determine the characters' attitudes and which provoke our emotional participation and identification (comprehension) are, of necessity, human images and events. Only when Benjamin succeeds in suppressing his embarrassment at exploiting machines and begins to believe fully that he is dealing with people does he begin to enjoy his vacation. "You know something? This place is really fun," he remarks after a session with a (robot) prostitute. And the illusion works the same way for the other guests. It is not their conscious awareness that these are robots, non-human machines, that determines their reactions, but rather their feeling and conviction that these "others" are some kind of less-than-human humans, real, living objectifications of their fantasies. So what we have in fact are the beginnings of a rather thinly disguised racial perspective, an exploitation justified by an explanation—the "others" are less than human—and by an economic right—the "guests" pay. The finger joints and eyes are not simple tooling marks or manufacturer's tags. They are the structural equivalents of "slanted eyes" or "kinky hair" in any racist ideology or psychology. They are racial characteristics. At this affective or psychological level, the underlying technological

“reality” functions only as a reassurance to the guests.

The spectator's attitudes reinforce this perspective. First of all because we are urged to share, in spite of the early ironies, the perceptions and feelings of Benjamin, Brolin, and the other “humans.” But more importantly it's because we know that these “others” are not the creation of a Hollywood or Disneyland fabricator. We see and we know that Crichton is filming real rattlesnakes and horses, real people playing roles, at least real actors and actresses. This awareness is not the same as that which allows any viewer to discredit the narrative in any fictional film. At least it is functioning here within the framework of the fiction of WESTWORLD by providing support for the characters' attitudes in the form of signs of real life, reinforcements of their enjoyment through belief in the illusion. The robot shots showing plasticized skin and transistorized viscera are simply metaphoric inserts, studio effects: We view a robot breast or blood spurting from a robot stomach with the same credibility or interest as when we see similar images in other fictional films. Their value is a human value. For the spectator too, then, the science fiction adventure is only a thin disguise for images and events whose meaning and impact are determined by a human value system.

The structure's dramatic and moral potentials are obvious, and Crichton's choices in these areas are revealing. WESTWORLD's makers and its publicity campaign claim to offer us the entertaining spectacle of an accidental catastrophe. It warns of the risks of a not too distant future where people's foolish desires and technological skills may succeed in destroying them. But this spectacle's events and images, and the discomfort and fears they evoke, are drawn from the most dramatic contemporary sources. What we are actually shown and what we are asked to respond to is a vision of oppression followed by an enraged revolt and subsequent suppression of the “other,” the terrifying, fearful spectacle of these less-than-human humans who refuse our programming.

It seems hardly coincidental, for instance, that Crichton should choose to burn his deranged gunslinger away, especially at a time (released summer 1973) when most Americans were haunted, or maybe just pestered, by the image of some “madman” igniting himself in front of impassive onlookers, or by visions of napalmed “fanatics” thrashing their charred bodies in the debris of battle. Nor does it seem coincidental that for the leader of the robot revolt Crichton should cast the former king of Thailand, the leader of the mad Huns, Mexican radical, inscrutable hired killer, the suggestively Mongol-featured Yul Brynner. Along with infrared sensing devices, weapons that kill only the “enemy,” willing, thankful prostitutes, etc., WESTWORLD simply provides the triumphant, guiltless hero that Indochina didn't. The avenger and moral example is Richard Benjamin, who brings his boy-next-door honesty, sensitivity, and automatic courage (from GOOD-BYE COLUMBUS) to WESTWORLD to destroy the berserk enemy. He is the hero who will return to Chicago to tell us of the horrors he has lived

through and to warn us of our own danger. In reality he simply represents a terrified act of self-preservation. His moral lesson is nothing more than a reassuring and misleading coverup of critical and real human prejudices and conflicts.

Nor does Crichton seem to be any more aware of these problems than his hero. His remarks in the introduction to the WESTWORLD script, "I like to think that audiences have fun with this film. We had fun making it," are hardly those of a director conscious of the fears and prejudices he is putting on the screen. They suggest, rather, a somewhat unreflective consciousness, mystified by its own mystifications.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Galileo

Losey, Brecht and Galileo

by Martin Walsh

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It is an irony of some magnitude that Ely Landau's American Film Theatre should have chosen to present Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo* as part of its second season. Ironic, at least, for the moviegoer who must pay \$4.50 to witness a work by one of the great "leftwing" artists of the century. Brecht's co-optation by the establishment repertoire has been complete for some years now. This bourgeois recuperation of the radical is neatly underlined by the context of this cinematic version of *Galileo*. Promoted as "high culture" now available to the provincial middle classes, both the advertising and the price tag are an outrageous confidence trick designed to appeal to a financial elite (as opposed to the magnificently populist desires of Brecht himself) susceptible to the notion that "*real art*" costs *money*. Just like a "real" theatre, the audience is given an unnecessary interval in the 145-minute film, and even a nice glossy "program" about the production, replete with witty red cover. On the back page, there's the Biographical Notes—about four inches for director Joseph Losey and star actor Topol, bandying about words such as "famous ... classics ... firmest reputation ... international recognition ... wide experience"

And there's little more than an inch at the bottom to tell us about Brecht; it lists titles of a few of his other plays. We read, "He left Germany in 1933 and traveled about Europe until settling in the United States from 1941 to 1947." Then it refers to his "anti-Nazi dramas" and the fact that he "collaborated with Kurt Weill on three musical productions." Sounds like a nice, cheery, humanist kind of fellow, doesn't he?

Curious, though—I mean, weren't Brecht's "travels" necessitated by political persecution? And wasn't that persecution aimed at the most significant political artist to appear since Soviet Russia spawned Meyerhold, Vertov, Eisenstein and the others during the twenties? And didn't the U.S. House Un-American Activities committee exile him yet again in 1947? Isn't this "program" a calculated bourgeois revisionism

designed to anaesthetize the once radical?

Fortunately, Brecht's *Galileo* rises above the twitching grasp of such whitewashing procedures. One of the strengths of the film, too, is the choice of Joseph Losey to direct it. Back in 1947 Losey had directed its first U.S. performance—the English version which Brecht had meticulously prepared with the equally painstaking Charles Laughton. Indeed it appears that Losey has long harbored a desire to film *Galileo*.

“Brecht gave me the exclusive rights to do *Galileo* in English for many years—and I couldn't get anybody to do it ... I consider the play virtually a scenario for a film ... The pressure of the Roman catholic church had barred any possibility of a film in Hollywood, because Laughton and I had tried to do it there before I left.”(1)

(Losey, like Brecht a few years earlier at the hands of HUAC, was forced by Hollywood's illegal blacklist to leave the United States.)

Subsequently, Losey almost raised the money in Europe for a film version. But the offer was withdrawn when Losey felt it beyond his power to *guarantee* the prospective producer “a brilliant performance.” Losey's integrity here, his refusal to play the role of either clairvoyant or opportunist, suggests the recuperative *context* of this AFT production may not extend to the film itself.

Nevertheless, when Losey says “my life has been ... full of *Galileo* since before I ever shot a feature film,” we might be curious to know why the anti-illusionist Brecht is so attractive to such a director of the illusionist tradition. In some respects *Galileo* is less “radical” than much of Brecht's earlier work. Formally it is less striking than his work of the thirties, which was more concerned than is *Galileo* with innovations in terms of the mechanics of the performance (interruptive, anti-illusionist devices such as moving platforms on the stage, the use of projected titles, the development of gestic acting, for instance). The emphasis on distanciation, on alienation techniques is not foregrounded in *Galileo* in the manner that it is in *The Threepenny Opera*. Brecht was aware of this. Ernst Shumacher writes,

“Brecht regarded *Galileo* as a play with ‘restricted’ alienation effects.”(2)

The reason for this was that Brecht's ideas about drama seemed, in the later years of his life, to shift away from the “epic” theatre, toward a “dialectical theatre.” His notions about dialectics were never fully theorized (unlike the notion of epic which was fully outlined in various writings of the late twenties and thirties), but *Galileo* seems to embody these ideas in practice.

That is to say, the narrative structure of *Galileo* is built in a clearly dialectical manner that is designed to make evident the contradictory forces at work in Galileo's life, to pose positive qualities against negative, public images against private, cerebral ideas against physical passions.

These co-existing polarities are organized in a web of complex symmetry. And, as Shumacher has pointed out, this symmetry was clearly worked out by Brecht's preliminary notes for the play. The point of mentioning this is to underline the fact that *Galileo* is not a product of the Brecht valued, say, by Godard and Gorin (whose allegiance centers around the "Notes to the Opera of 1930). For the emphasis on symmetry suggests closure, a concern with "wholeness" and "unity" that is somewhat at odds with the more open-ended theatrical forms of his earlier years. But it is comparatively consonant with the "illusionist" narrative tradition represented by Losey.

However, in the circumstances, the comparative conservatism of *Galileo* is its virtue: Brecht's concentration on the internal relations of the text (as opposed to its physical relationship to the audience) gives it a coherence and strength that almost *defies* distortion by unsympathetic direction. (Not that Losey is unsympathetic, however.) The play revolves around the figure of Galileo, over the span of his mature life. This life is related to a crucial moment in intellectual history: the supercession of the Ptolemaic world view (earth as center of the universe) by the Copernican (sun as center, earth as planet). Galileo fights for the recognition and acceptance of this new knowledge—for a revolution in consciousness. The play's narrative traces the contours of this struggle, thereby identifying the strengths and limitations of Galileo's revolutionary endeavor.

Brecht presents Galileo's arguments with the ruling nobility of Italy, his clashes with the Church, and the Inquisition—in short his struggle to continue his research in pursuit of the truth. The path Galileo took is one presented by Brecht in various lights, both negative and positive. His obsequious courting of favors from the Grand Duke, his readiness to wreck his daughter's happiness in order to continue his research, his recantation of Copernican theory (for fear of physical torture) are set against his ideological veracity, his conviction that "My intention is not to prove that I was right, but to find out *whether* I was right," his brilliant argumentative powers. Brecht's presentation of Galileo is in no sense an idealist one. It presents the man in all his frailties, as both hero (intellectually) and coward (physically), as loving and betraying truth. One fulcrum the play rests on is the scene of Galileo's recantation, which suggests both that (idealistically) Galileo betrays truth by recanting, while (pragmatically) he preserves it in preserving his life to enable him to continue his research in secret, for benefit of later ages.

The dawning of a new age, the inevitable setbacks to its immediate implementation, the difficulties confronting any one individual who sets his sights on such a revolutionary endeavor—these are the concerns of *Galileo*. We know today how close to impossible it is for any individual to dissociate himself/ herself from the mechanisms of the dominant society. "By setting the name Medici in the skies I am bestowing immortality on the stars." Galileo's servility toward the Prince is undoubtedly ironic, since in the scene preceding its utterance, it has been pointed out that Copernican theory effectively abolishes heaven.

However ironic Galileo's stance, the fact remains that he is economically dependent on the very culture whose demise his theories announce.

Clearly there is no ready answer to this dilemma, even today, as Jon Jost's *SPEAKING DIRECTLY: SOME AMERICAN NOTES* makes clear. In Jost's case, his retreat to the woods, his attempted withdrawal from intercourse with the dominant ideology has proven elusive. He still needs a camera (product of alienated French workers), and a laboratory to process the film (oppressed technicians?). He still has to take his film from city to city by automobile. In short, contradiction is inherent in the revolutionary's activity, and might be said to be the essential theme of *Galileo*.

Certainly it was a theme that preoccupied Brecht through the forties, as we see in his analysis of Breughel's pictorial contrasts.

“In *The Fall of Icarus* the catastrophe breaks into the idyll in such a way that it is clearly set apart from it and valuable insights into the idyll can be gained. He doesn't allow the catastrophe to alter the idyll; the latter rather remains unaltered and survives undestroyed, merely disturbed.”(3)

Similarly Brecht shows that the Copernican “catastrophe” didn't result in any immediate radical transformation of the social order—mass action is the only precedent for that. So the problem remains of how to communicate new and “subversive” knowledge to the masses. That dilemma, however, is not the subject of *Galileo*. It is better, therefore, that I return to our immediate task: appraisal of Losey's version of *Galileo*.

As indicated earlier, Losey had wanted to film *Galileo* since the late forties. It is not surprising that for the most part (with the exception of the unnecessary music added to Hans Eisler's original score) he seems to stay close to Brecht/ Laughton's original English version. Losey's use of color, as far as the costumes are concerned, fulfills Brecht's intentions. This is Brecht's own description:

“Each scene had to have its basic tone ... the entire sequence had to have its development in terms of color. In the first scene a deep and distinguished blue made its entrance with Ludovico Marsili, and this deep blue remained, set apart, in the second scene with the upper bourgeoisie in their grey green coats made of felt and leather. Galileo's social ascent could be followed by means of color. The silver and pearl-grey of the fourth (court) scene led into a nocturne in brown and black (where Galileo is jeered at by the monks of the Collegium Romanum), then on to the eighth, the cardinal's ball, with delicate and fantastic individual masks (ladies and gentlemen) moving among the cardinals' crimson figures. That was a burst of color, but it still had to be fully unleashed, and this occurred in the ninth scene, the carnival. Then came the descent into dull and somber colours....”(4)

In other words, Brecht uses color and texture of cloth as an index of wealth and power. Marsili's deep blue is of greater opulence than the grey-green of the upper bourgeoisie, and he remains distinguished from them. The crimson worn by the cardinals serves to designate their omnipotence. At the moment at which Galileo seems to find himself and his theories accepted, he is shown mingling with the crimson clad cardinals. Subsequently as he falls from favor, the vigor of this red disappears from Galileo's environment. Losey remains faithful to this structure, the cardinals' crimson, Ludovico's blue, and the carnival-singer's multicolored patchwork garb being the only chromatic eruptions to disturb the predominant grey, black, brown and off-white of Galileo's world.

Losey ignores any temptation to embellish or decorate Brecht's structure. His work as director is characterized by its restraint. Naturally he weights a particular interpretation of the play through his choice of framing, of cuts, and so on. But one does feel his sensitivity to the demands of the text, a stylistic subordination to Brecht's structure. In the scene at the Cardinal's ball between Galileo and Cardinal Barbarini (who is later to be Pope), the two men exchange a series of epigrammatic proverbs, a verbal duel that builds with intensity to Barbarini's climactic and threatening, "Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be burned?"

Losey's mise-en-scene here is elegantly executed. The camera tracks and pans skillfully to relate the two men (the Cardinal in red, Galileo in black robes) weaving in and around the white marble pillars that serve visually to support their verbal thrust and parry. Or again, look at the scene of Galileo's recantation, in which we see not Galileo's agony but that of his pupils, contrasted with his daughter Virginia's prayers that he will be "saved." This is one of the dramatic peaks of the play. Losey reserves for it an expressionistic treatment reminiscent of *IVAN THE TERRIBLE*—huge shadows cast on the walls behind the actors, a starkly simple set consisting of a table and chess set on the left (chess the symbol of conflict, that is crucial to this dialectical drama), Galileo's empty chair in the center, and a skeletal flight of stairs on the right, atop which Virginia prays while Galileo's disciples hover uneasily on the left. Losey allows this tension to develop on the screen by keeping both parties simultaneously in the frame, with only minimal use of close shots. The clarity and power of this scene is quite extraordinary, the more so by contrast to Losey's restraint elsewhere in the film, which has a rather more naturalistic base.

Not that Losey isn't prey to a certain dogmatism at points. The huge close-up as Galileo speaks directly at the camera, early in the film, prophesying the future significance of astronomy, is one example. But even here one feels Losey's intent is fidelity to the spirit of Brecht's *educative* endeavor. (Immediately apparent in the very first scene, as Galileo meticulously explains the Ptolemaic world-view to the young Andrea, which he follows with a practical demonstration of the Copernican alternative). The *surprise* of this large close shot functions

to undercut any simple “identification” with the figure of Galileo. Brecht’s drama is, of course, an anti-illusionist, anti-identificatory one which demands that we exercise our intellects rather than simply our emotions. In this respect it is salutary to recall Brecht on the actor’s responsibility:

“At no moment must he go so far as to he wholly transformed into the character played ... This principle—that the actor appears on the stage in a double role, as Laughton and as Galileo—comes to mean simply that the tangible, matter-of-fact process is no longer hidden behind a vest; that Laughton is actually there, standing on the stage and showing us what he imagines Galileo to have been.”(5)

This is where the film’s Brechtianism begins to break down. Topol is not Laughton, and his conception of the role is a simple *immersion* in his notion of “the character” of Galileo. His performance is naturalistic, rather than alienated. This stylistic tension reappears in the film itself. On the one hand, we have the predominantly naturalistic performances of Mary Larkin as Galileo’s daughter, Virginia, and Richard O’Caliaghan as Fulganzio. And on the other, the magnificently Brechtian engagement of Cohn Blakely with his role as Priuli, where his gestic vitality imparts an exemplary clarity to his performance. Watch the way his hands are used to denote “manipulative thought at work,” for instance; it is a didactic performance, but splendidly witty and energetic. Or again, John Gielgud’s cameo scene as the expostulating and aged Cardinal is a caricature of exquisite balance, culminating in his physical collapse even as he hits the word “immortal.” Similarly, the performance of the ballad singer and his wife (Clive Revill and Georgia Brown) has a direct vigor that recalls much of the spirit of Lotte Lenya and the visual power of Breughel.

And yet—well, the essential problem with the film as far as Brechtianism is concerned lies in Losey’s very fidelity to the “distanciation” techniques of the original production. In the intervening twenty-eight years audiences have become so used to such devices that they no longer function efficaciously. Brecht’s episodic structures, for instance the use of the chorus and printed titles, no longer alienate us in the manner they once did. The point behind “distanciation” is that we are provoked into thought, jolted into exercising our rational faculties, rather than allowed to emote serenely and passively throughout the performance. At one time, the use of projected titles on the stage had an interruptive effect, since it cut across the expected conventions of the genre, thereby creating a meaning that could not be *un*-consciously responded to, consumed by the audience. One of the most vital precepts of Brechtian theory is the notion that alienation devices must never be reduced to *mere technique* or *convention*, for then they become “invisible” and our identificatory propulsions are *not* efficiently interrupted. Thus Losey’s GALILEO seems from time to time to approach (though not to rival) the spurious “Brechtianism” of Lindsay Anderson’s O LUCKY MAN.

What Brecht taught, and Godard learned, was that alienation devices must be continually re-invented, if they are to retain any value. Thus Godard's distancing techniques are rarely iterative but always search for a new mode of expression, in a perpetually heuristic endeavor. One obvious example from the work of Godard/ Gorin is their evolving use of the lateral tracking shot, which refuses to allow us to "enter" the "depth" of the frame in the conventional illusionist manner. Another example is constituted by the various disjunctions between image-track and sound-track that recur through Godard's work, from *BAND OF OUTSIDERS* to *TOUT VA BIEN*. What we must note is that the recurrence of this disjunction is in no sense formulaic, but consistently inventive, probing, seeking to surprise and jolt our intellects.

Early in the film *Galileo* ruminates on the fact that people began to make progress only when ships left the safety of the shoreline—this is the kind of courage Losey lacks. One suspects that the passing of twenty-five years has made little change in Losey's vision of how *Galileo* should be done. And yet, having said this, I feel remorseful—for if we stop to think of what the AFT *could* have done to *Galileo*, we should perhaps be thankful for a production of as much integrity as Losey's. Losey may not be the radical director Brecht deserves. But his production is consistently restrained and allows the incomparable intelligence of Brecht's text to thrust through to us. For *Galileo* is one of the very greatest dramas of this century, and it seems to have the rare ability of transcending even the worst production. Its verbal profundity, like Shakespeare's, is somehow indestructible. And its articulation of the basic dilemmas of revolutionary consciousness is absolutely haunting. After *Galileo*'s recantation, his pupil Andrea laments "Pity the country that has no hero," to which comes the somber retort, "Pity the country that *needs* a hero." This contradiction hangs in the air long after its utterance, resisting dissolution. For as well as the need for mass action (as *Galileo* suggests), there remains the need which Andrea urges—for the lone bearers of the knowledge that subverts our conventional orientation, that alone may change our consciousness. For it is this knowledge, in the broadest sense, that must lay the base for mass action. To the rarity of this fusion both history and *Galileo* attest.

Notes

[1.](#) Losey interviewed by Tom Milne, *Losey on Losey*, Secker and Warburg, 1967, pp. 168-72. The following Losey quotes are from this interview.

[2.](#) Ernst Shumacher, "The Dialectics of *Galileo*, in *Brecht*, ed. E. Monk, Bantam, 1972, p. 214.

[3.](#) *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. Willett, New York, 1964, p. 157.

[4.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[5.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94.

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Le Gai Savoir Picture and act—Godard's plexus

by James Monaco

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[from *The New Wave* by James F. Monaco, Oxford
University Press, to be published later this year, 1975.]

WEEKEND had been intended as a global portrait, and as a political instrument. As a portrait it succeeds, but as a psychological weapon which might shift the level of consciousness of those who watched it, it was not particularly successful. No film, no work of art ever is, in large part because of the extraordinary capacity of bourgeois liberalism for co-opting and subsuming opposing ideas. The shock effects of WEEKEND have become the commonplaces of bourgeois cinema in the seventies. Clearly, something more was needed. It was not going to be possible to make the new cinema by using the language of the old. Having returned to zero, Godard had to start over again. LE GAI SAVOIR is the first step. It is Godard's ultimate effort at "semioclasm,"⁽¹⁾ the name critic Roland Barthes gave to the necessary job of breaking down the signs of the languages we take for granted in order to rebuild them on stronger foundations.

French state television, O.R.T.F., had offered Godard an opportunity to make a television film, and late in 1967 he turned to the task. He shot LE GAI SAVOIR in December of 1967 and January of 1968, in the dead of winter, after the intense experiences of LA CHINOISE, "Caméra-Oeil," and WEEKEND. It was just before the Langlois affair when Godard led the fight against the political firing of the director of the Cinémathèque—and the civil uprising in the spring of 1968—at the last possible moment before contemplation would be overtaken by events and surpassed by action. It is one of his finest films, and also one of his most difficult.

The offer from O.R.T.F. was salutary. The new medium would allow him new liberties and force him to redefine his cinema. The small screen would force him to focus on the essential—to stop down the images and sound. A straight essay on the order of LE GAI SAVOIR would never

have been commercially viable in theatrical cinemas, but the intimate personal nature of television suited the form well. In fact, Godard chose the most common and effective form of television—the interview—as a model for LE GAI SAVOIR.

The film is one of the very rare examples of the muse of the medium of cinema for what we have to admit is almost pure intellectual discourse. If Godard has filmed a “summa,” then this is it. The title of the film expresses the essential spirit of Godard’s work as well as any phrase I can think of: Le Gai Savoir, The Joy of Learning.

Émile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Leaud), the great-great-grandson of Jean-Jacques, and Patricia Lumumba (Juliet Berto), daughter of the Third World, stumble over each other one night in an unused television studio. They embark on a series of seven latenight dialogues during which they try to develop a rigorous analysis of the relation between politics and film. They meet for seven evenings (that is the structure of the film). More often than not, one of them is late (that is its plot). Needless to say, in an hour and a half of film time Godard, Émile and Patricia cannot give us the kind of detailed, closely reasoned exposition that we (and they) would like to have. What we can expect, however, and what we do get is a filmic summary of the areas that should be investigated.

LE GAI SAVOIR, as always with Godard, is a *poetic* essay: it is qualitative, not quantitative. It is therefore at the same time simple and complex, structured and anarchic, clear and ironic, revealing and confounding. It is, after all, using film language to discuss that language. The meaning will be as much in our response to the film’s totality as in its syllogistic narrative.

Because we can’t use the convenient shorthand of “character,” “plot,” and “significance” to describe the film, it is unusually difficult to discuss it in still another medium. Here, for example, is a précis of the “First Night”:

Radio sounds ... narration: ‘8,247 frames, 22,243, 72,000, 125,000 ... about 7,500 feet. 127,000 feet.’ Patrice comes in (the background is a black void), dressed in red and blue, carrying a clear umbrella with yellow stripes. It is her ‘anti-nuclear umbrella,’ she explains. She trips over Émile. He tells us about her, she about him. She is Patricia Lumumba, the Third World delegate to the Citroen auto plant. He is Émile Rousseau, great-great-grandson of Jean-Jacques.

She announces: ‘I want to learn, to teach myself, to teach everyone that we must turn back against the enemy that weapon with which he attacks us: Language.’ ‘We are on TV,’ he says. ‘Then let’s go into people’s homes and ask them what we want to know,’ she replies. Frame: SAVOIR (to know). Pan to black. A montage of street scenes and pictures ending with the cartoon (p. 000) which ‘identifies’ Godard mathematically with zero. Muddled radio voices. The story of

Les Afraniches ('Les Français,' after the 'computer mutations.')

'Let's start from zero,' he says. 'No,' she replies, 'it is necessary to return to zero first.' It is necessary to dissolve sounds and images in order to analyze them. 'Images: we meet them by chance, we don't choose them. Knowledge will lead us to the rules for the *production* of images.' 'In 'isolate' you have 'island.' We are on an island.' Things and phenomena. Video pictures and sounds. 'The first year we collect images and sounds and experiment. The second year we criticize all that: decompose, recompose. The third year we attempt some small models of reborn film.' 'It's almost dawn.' They walk away, out of the frame. Pictures, streets. Che. Mao."

If the static is confused and confusing, that is because Godard wants to convey his sense of the then contemporary existential revolt as ideologically confusing, a mixture of bourgeois romanticism (Émile Rousseau) and third-world realism (Patricia Lumumba). How to get out of this forest of confusing sounds and images? How to avoid the trap? Godard experiments with two theories in this respect in LE GAI SAVOIR. First, he "stops down" the materials—sounds, images, characters, ideas—of the film, limiting himself so that he can *know* what he is producing. Second, he forcibly distanciates the film: "We are on TV," Émile and Patricia continually remind us. Totally black sections of leader punctuate the film, further forcing the point.

If the film is both materialist *and* distanciated, then maybe it will be possible for viewers of LE GAI SAVOIR to use it rather than consume it. (Certainly, it is a nearly impossible film to consume: it sticks in the craw, refuses to be digested.) The method is "decompose—recompose," to break down the elements of the film medium in order to build them up, to analyze in order to re-synthesize. If LE GAI SAVOIR (or my short summary of this first section of it) seems hermetic and purposefully dense, that is because audiences tend to judge this film like most others—as a product to be consumed—and it most definitely is not. It is a film to be *used*—difficult? Yes. But not so intractable if we actively work it through.

The metaphor for the film is radio static (which this condensed summary of the "first night" can't convey). What we will be able to seize from this essay will come in bits and pieces, even as it does to Jean-Luc, Émile and Patricia. They are awash in a bubbling, roiling sea of images and sounds, radio static and video ghosts, incessantly bombarded with bits of information, almost all of it designed by the "enemy" to serve its purposes. Patricia and Émile find some precious respite in the dark studio in the quiet of the night. They, for awhile, exist alone in this shimmering black void. There is no horizon, there is no ground level. (There are only three other speaking characters in the film—an old man, a young boy, and a young girl, who are interviewed.) But there is always

the voice of the narrator (Godard), incessantly commenting on and expanding the logic of the film: his urgent whisper accompanied by the electronic noise that pervades a media-ridden society.

LE GAI SAVOIR is a quest for the purity and comfort of “zero.” There are no reasoned maxims in the film, no directives or conclusions that one could take home and pin on the wall as incentives to action. That kind of work comes later. As the narrator says, “Half the shots of this film are missing.” They are left to “Bertolucci, Straub, and Glauber-Rocha.” “Zero” is the key to the constellation of concepts which is LE GAI SAVOIR. The structure of the film is mathematical—a dialectic of asymptotes, those conceptual lines on an algebraic graph which curves approach but never touch. It is not the *location* which is significant, but the approach to it, not the *object*, but the *sign*. Émile says,

“It’s necessary to be very careful not to fall into the ideology of being true-to-life, a trap not always avoided by filmmakers as important as Dreyer, Bresson, Antonioni, Bergman.”

Again, we remember: “Realism does not consist in reproducing reality, but in showing how things really are.” So we have no easily comprehended narrative in LE GAI SAVOIR. Neither do we have a linear, logical exegesis. What we do have is a cluster of qualities and tentative ideas. The film is about process, so the essence of it must be process.

The dialectic out of which will grow our understanding of “how things really are” has three dimensions. First, Patricia-Émile (the dramatic dialectic we have understood since childhood). Second, between the characters and the narrator-filmmaker. They are his creations, of course, but as soon as they say what he has written for them, it is necessary to qualify, react. (This tension is heightened by the history of the film’s production. O.R.T.F. rejected the film and later sold it back to Godard. It appears that he edited it sometime after the spring of 1968 when his own ideas, we may assume, had changed appreciably. LE GAI SAVOIR wasn’t shown publicly until June 1969.) Third, between the film and the audience, the most difficult but in the end the most important. If we become too involved in the subject of the argument between Émile and Patricia, then the narrator raises us to another level. If we become fixed in the relation between the narrator and his invented characters, then the film itself, by its very density and conflation of images and sounds, will hoist us up to a level of distancing.

In order that we do not take the specifics of the film at face value, Godard sets them in a mosaic of fantasy. What do Patricia and Émile do between sessions? One day, “Michel and I are going to steal the dreams of two pop stars and sell them and send the money to North Vietnam.” Another day, Patricia is going to bomb an Italian theatre because they won’t “let films be shown in the original language.” (Italian films are almost always post-dubbed.) Still another day, Patricia is off to show movies to strikers—LOLA MONTES and THE GREAT DICTATOR. Near the end, Émile, speaking with Patricia’s voice, explains “how I killed

Kennedy on orders from Lautreamont's ghost." At dawn he goes to visit Litvinov and Bukovski.

It is necessary, above all, for Godard that the film not deal with tangible actuality. That would make it just another false mirror of reality. The film must be *presentational* and avoid the fallacy of the *representational*. It cannot—no film can—reproduce reality honestly. It can only produce itself. In order for it to do that honestly, it will have to reinvent itself after discovering what it is exactly about the way film is used today that makes it false ("fauxtographie," as the title in WEEKEND has it). Godard's aim, as always (but here more explicit), is not to *divorce* film from life, but by distancing his art to make it possible for us to *integrate* it into our lives. When we see no qualitative difference between film and life, we then have no sense of film, *as itself*, and it is therefore useless—insidious. We are back in the world of the multiple sentences of "subject" and "object" which formed the impetus for 2 OR 3 THINGS. Like that film, this one reminds us once again that for Godard process is more important than achievement, the questions are more valuable than the answers, and attempts are more admirable than successes. What was the point of all those advisory subtitles—a film in the process of making itself, a film lost in the cosmos, fragments of a film ...—if not to insist that we recognize that the films were not completed, "perfect," but only the premises of syllogisms to which we must provide the conclusions.

Godard tells us at the end of LE GAI SAVOIR that he and his film have...

"not wished to, cannot wish to, explain the cinema, nor even to become the goal it seeks, but more modestly to offer a few effective methods for reaching it. This is not the film which must be made, but shows how, if one is making a film, that film must follow some of the paths indicated here."

This apologia is basic to LE GAI SAVOIR and to the experimental Dziga-Vertov films that follow. It also represents one of the main reasons people find these films tedious. In order to appreciate what Godard is up to after 1968, I think it's necessary to understand and accept the logical and psychological premises that lead Godard to give us this warning. It will be repeated in each of the Dziga-Vertov films and will reach a self-parodic climax in the introduction to LETTER TO JANE, in which Godard spends nearly half the time of the film cautioning us to approach its substance with care and reservation. Is this just evidence of Godard's own anxiety and sense of inadequacy in the face of the task he has set for himself (a task, we should remind ourselves, that many people regard as abstract and futile)? In a way, I suppose it is, but we think of it as such only when we don't share Godard's passion for the semioclastic work of rebuilding cinema. We might as well charge Pirandello, Brecht, or Beckett with small-mindedness: they did the same kind of work in the theatre.

As intellectually distant as it may seem, LE GAI SAVOIR is also an impassioned cry of the heart. This is dangerous ground, returning to

zero. That way madness lies, as well as knowledge. As Richard Rood points out,

“It takes great effort to look at everything afresh, to call everything, even words, into question.”

Our wonder is not that Godard made this film (and the ones which follow it), but that he survived the experience. Roud, who has a healthy ambivalence about the film, also wonders whether the austerity of it is entirely due to its ideological premises and function. He suggests that it might also be “a kind of psychological despoiling, a masochistic denuding.” It is; that is part of the strategy of the film. The primal question Godard raises is maddeningly elusive: How is it possible to make films (or any other art) that are honest and life-affirmative? We prefer not to think about all that. We would rather just go ahead making films. Aren't questions like that, after all, the province of wizened professionals and deadly critics? Too technical and abstract for audiences of general intelligence?

Maybe so. Yet for Godard, the very existence of the medium of film is one of the three or four major political phenomena of this century. A filmmaker, a craftsman, who has not set his/her own house in order—who has not ideologically and technically seized the means of productions—can hardly hope for any ulterior political success. One of the great sadnesses of *LE GAI SAVOIR* (the title is at once ironic and joyous) is that we now know about these problems and therefore can't avoid confronting them.

So the apologia (and the involuted form of the film) is necessary for psychological reasons. It makes us personally involved in Godard's knotty struggle, as do the hand-written signs and words that punctuate the film. To read print is to be conscious only of the meaning, the “significance.” To read handwriting is to recognize the importance of the words and the intelligence behind them, the “signifiers” (and “the signifier!”). When Godard puts himself and his words in his films, he is “signifyin” the way Black people mean the word.

There is a strict logical provenance for this method, as well. The involutions, the parallel articulations, the spiral patterns, the self-references, the metaphorical contradictions, the sometimes purposive and purposeful inscrutability of the discourse, the dependence on dependent clauses (both strictly, in prose, and metaphorically, in cinematic equivalents)—these are all characteristics of modern dialectical thought. (Please note that in this sentence I am, talking about the style of dialectical criticism, while in the succeeding sentences we shift to a *concept* of it. Typical!) Louis Althusser, for example, produces some beautiful variations on the Marxian concept of Causality, which is “structural, complex” rather than “linear” or even “expressive.” In “Structural Causality” the effects are caused by the global whole of the structure of causes—ideological, economic, epistemological, political. The metaphor of cause-and-effect is then not a linear “chain” but rather a “critical mass” which, when reached, gives forth an explosion of

“effects.” This is why Godard has to “put everything” into his films. Only then can the critical mass be achieved.

And while we are making this foray into the wilderness of dialectical metaphysics, let me add an apology of my own. This is not the study of Godard’s work that should be written, but shows how, if one is making such a study, that study must follow some of the paths indicated here. I realize that I have given you nothing clear and concrete that you can carry away, nothing that “pins down” *LE GAI SAVOIR*. But as Frederic Jameson says in his preface to *Marxism and Form*:

“In the language of Adorno ... density is itself a conduct of intransigence: the bristling mass of abstractions and cross-references is precisely intended to be read in situation, against the cheap facility of what surrounds it, as a warning to the reader of the price he has to pay for genuine thinking.”

And likewise to the viewers of the price they have to pay. This method of thought-as-art is probably more familiar and more comfortable for French observers of Godard, accustomed as they are to the theoretical fireworks of the likes of Althusser, Metz and Lacan, than it is for English-speaking people. This method has validity, then, even if there is also a strong criticism to be made of it.

All this, I realize, is coldly (if elegantly) abstract and doesn't very well convey the experience of the film. *LE GAI SAVOIR* is a film of ideas, a film of Method. But it is also a film, like any other, composed of images and sounds, and they are striking in themselves. The orange-ribbed umbrella, the liquescent blackness of the studio, the side-lighting and back-lighting that make icons of Leaud’s and Berto’s faces (there is a sexual underpinning to their discussions), the face of the old man who is interviewed—straight out of Cezanne’s “The Card-Players”—the Cuban revolutionary hymn that punctuates the film, the dialectic pans which move from Émile to Patricia and then, still moving in the same direction, through the black void back to Émile; the simple cartoon which is so poignantly self-effacing, yet complex and sarcastic, the muddled radio static juxtaposed with Godard’s tense, sad whisper, Patricia riding a bicycle around Émile like Brially around Karina in *A WOMAN IS A WOMAN* (again, Berto’s resemblance to Karina should not be ignored), the usual stark, strong reds and blues, here isolated against the black and therefore even more balanced and assured, Patricia in yellow and purple against cartoons of comic book heroes; above all, the vast, noisy, jumbled, careful collation of sounds and images which “dissolve themselves in order to analyze themselves.”

The film’s “Seventh Night” gives us the struggle’s planned “third year,” which will be devoted to building “a few models of sounds and images” for the future. It is a catalogue of types of discourse in film: the historical film (Patricia in costume); the imperialist film (we see the back of Patricia’s head; she sings scales, he sings a single note, finally overpowering her and forcing her to do the same), the International film (the image is missing; the narrator makes suggestions), the

Experimental film (Mozart and a magnetic line drawing), the Psychological film (he is readings; she reads, “The Sweet being two.”), the Guerrilla film (he describes her face as a Molotov cocktail), the film tract (a collage of slogans: “Read, Criticize, Listen, Watch.”), and finally the “Film d’Role,” as good a title for this film as can be found—Émile (and Jean-Pierre) is off to Bratislava to shoot a film with Skolimowski. “Half the shots of this film are missing.” Emile and Patricia talk about them. Finally, the word, “MISOTODIMAN” is invented, “the word I finally found for sounds and images,” Godard tells us, a mixture of Method and Sentiment.

The Method of LE GAI SAVOIR is clear (well, at least it is clearly a film *of* method). What about the “Sentiment”? LE GAI SAVOIR is propadeutic, elemental, almost paranoid at times because of the fear of language on which it rests. But it is also, like 2 OR 3 THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER, a painful personal essay. Its aim is nothing less than the beginning of a rigorous examination of the systems of signs through which and by means of which politics, love, beauty, and existence are expressed and understood. It speaks of love and eroticism, workers and bosses, of language and meaning with the sad but incisive humor that informs Godard’s best work. As it destroys the language it would analyze, it creates sounds and images of intuitive sense.

“What is really at stake,” Patricia discovers, “is one’s image of oneself.” Film and politics are as much a part of the self as one’s eyes and ears. (“The eye should listen before it looks.”) Or, as the song Émile sings puts it, there is a constant current between man’s biological nature and his intellectual construction.

This is the ultimate Godardian struggle—to fuse Method with Sentiment, to overcome the fact of the self, to reconstruct the expression of self, finally to give rebirth to the self and so to sanity. LE GAI SAVOIR, one realizes, is a film about a man and a woman: a love story of sorts (the allusion to A WOMAN IS A WOMAN is not accidental). Both the film and the idea of LE GAI SAVOIR rest on an encounter between the great-great-grandson of the father of humanist romanticism and the daughter of Third World realism. This is the dialectic which has been the engine of Godard’s work as a filmmaker. And Godard is strung out between the two poles, like Matthew Arnold (another essayist as artist), struck between two worlds, the one dead, the other powerless to be born.

At the end, Émile, Patricia, Godard and we are left with the neoseme: MISOTODIMAN. What better way to describe Godard’s own moral coordinates: Method the vertical axis, Sentiment the horizontal. He is himself a true descendant of Rousseau, courting the daughter of the Third World. If the marriage is ever effected, it will doubtless be through the proper combination of head and heart, method and sentiment. We have abrogated the social contract which Emile’s progenitor spoke of two centuries ago, and LE GAI SAVOIR is a film about form, not content, which explains, subliminally, how we have done so. The job of

the succeeding films will be to rewrite that contract.

On the third night, at 3 a.m., in the exact middle of the edifice of the film, Godard quotes Che Guevara:

“A revolutionary—an authentic one—is guided by great feelings of love.”

This is the deepest meaning of LE GAI SAVOIR. But Godard does not give us the introductory clause of that sentence. Che had originally said, “At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that a revolutionary—an authentic one—is guided by great feelings of love.” Godard, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, has given us a deeply felt essay which reflects with all of its confusions and self-induced paralysis his own frightening sense of the media universe in which we live.

“Patricia: It’s more or less nothing that we have discovered, no?

Émile: Not at all. Listen: what better ideal to propose to the men of today, one which would be above and beyond themselves, if not the reconquest, through knowledge, of the nothingness they themselves have discovered? “

How? Through a proper mixture of Method and Sentiment. LE GAI SAVOIR is the first *film d'role*.

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Le Gai Savoir Godard and Eisenstein— notions of intellectual cinema

by Ruth Perlmutter

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It is inevitable in the development of a genre that radical departures from tradition enter popular culture and are incorporated into a voguish convention. This has occurred with some of the radicalizations of Jean-Luc Godard. One of his major breakthrough strategies of extreme self-reflexivity—that is, the disruption of fictional representation by the presence of the filmmaker and the exposure of the filmmaking process—has become a fashionable mode in European commercial cinema. At least three films in the past year, Truffaut's *DAY FOR NIGHT*, Lelouch's *AND NOW MY LOVE*, and Michel Orach's *LES VIOLONS DU BAL* (and in some respects, a fourth, *LAST TANGO IN PARIS*), can be characterized as part of a new genre—the Romantic Reflexive film. In each, a filmmaker wrestles with a reconstruction of his personal past as it collides with certain sociopolitical realities.

Godard's iconoclasm in his challenge to the classical narrative film with movie parody and anti-narrative disjunctions has been stylized in these films into a rigid narrative schema. The process of creating an autobiographical film furnishes the storytelling grid for the self-remembering director.

Critical interpretations of Godard's contributions and works of more creative sensibilities have been forcefully influenced by his innovations—such as the third world films of Glauber Rocha; the feminist tract by Michele Rosier, *GEORGES QUI*; the German filmmaker Von Syderberg's *LUDWIG* series; the Italian film by Roberto Gianmarelli, *I HAVE NO TIME (NON HO TEMPO)*; and the recent spate of structuralist documentaries, including Jon Jost's *SPEAKING DIRECTLY* and Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *PENTHESILEA*. However, critical interpretations of Godard's contributions have scarcely reached paper, and now we witness Godard's institutionalization into slick formulaic films.

All the more reason why it is important to elaborate his sources and to see where he is coming from, as in his affinities with Sergei Eisenstein, and especially with reference to Eisenstein's notions of intellectual cinema. At first blush, it might seem unlikely to seek a kinship between Godard and Sergei Eisenstein. (More probable, especially in terms of the reflexive mode, is Godard's alignment with Eisenstein's pyrotechnical contemporary, Dziga Vertov.)

Eisenstein's method was based on a belief that the juxtaposition of opposing forces would create a metaphor for political action. For example, in his equation of Kerensky with a peacock, Napoleon and toy soldiers in *OCTOBER*, he created a context for the conflict between the inertia of unjust authoritarian power and the dynamic struggle of the proletariat.

Godard, on the other hand, relies on the agitational properties of radical disjunctions that have little or no correlation. His Brechtian interruptions (brief inserts of pop culture mythologies), his exaggerations of the filmmaking process, and his working-out of methodology within his films strike a different tension from Eisenstein. More arbitrary in his choices,⁽¹⁾ Godard calls all relations into question because of his earnest desire to shake up what is going on in the head.

Godard, however, like Eisenstein, is concerned with similar notions about film form—the relation of the cinematic image to the structure of language and the process of human thought, its connections to the physical reality of people and things, and the wished for transformation of ideology as a result of the isolation and recombination of structural forms. Aware of the disjunctions caused by the mental process in its collision with the objective world, they share the romantic desire to fuse the two.

Like Eisenstein, too, Godard has the same aim—to teach. No matter how arbitrary and apparently irrelevant his method seems, he wants to bring people to what they have always known and to start them over again with a very particular formulation of ideological beliefs that are tied to a rigorous structure and process.

This may explain why his concept of Zero, which appears in a number of his films, is integral to his pedagogic technique. It is at Zero, at first principles, at the spatial location where sounds and images can be isolated and freed of each other, that we can change what goes on in the head. Godard's motto is neologism—of words, of sounds, of images, and of film form.

Eisenstein envisions the ultimate of the intellectual cinema as the inner monologue (specifically Joycean) and described it as the “slipping from the objective into the subjective.” This inner monologue, he stated, finds its fullest expression in the cinema. He specifies the montage lists that would reconstruct the course of thought:

“Like thought, they would sometimes proceed with visual images. With sound. Synchronized or non-synchronized. Then as sounds. Formless. Or with sound-images: with objectively representational sounds ...”

“Then suddenly, definite intellectually formulated words—as ‘intellectual’ and dispassionate as pronounced words. With a black screen, a rushing imageless visuality.”

“Then in passionate disconnected speech. Nothing but nouns. Or nothing but verbs. Then interjections. With zigzags of aimless shapes, whirling along with those in synchronization.”

“Then racing visual images over complete silence.”

“Then linked with polyphonic sounds. Then polyphonic images. Then both at once.”(2)

Similarly, Godard deals with the “inner movement” of subjective and objective description when describing the search for structures” in his film, TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER:

“The sum of the objective description and the subjective description should lead to the discovery of ... a certain complex feeling ...[and]... corresponds to the inner movement of the film, which is the attempt to describe a complex (people and things), since no distinction is made between them and, in order to simplify, people are spoken of as things, and things as people ...”(3)

Godard achieves this in practice as well. In the garage sequence of TWO OR THREE THINGS, the various levels of discourse work towards a dissolution of subject into object. The image track contains the objective description of things, people, signs, the society’s collective mythologies. The narrating, whispering consciousness conducts an anxiety-ridden semiotic discourse on the relation between sign and referent, between image and world. On one hand, the camera movements create an interplay of language, signs, color patterns, planes and people which function together as formal structural elements of objective description. On the other hand, there is a subjective imposition in an attempt to fuse the phenomenal world with what is thought about it, as in the poetic zoom from the reflection of the leaves on the hood of the car to the leaves of the tree. The support or contradiction of the images by the narration corresponds with the problems posed by the text—that despite the flexibility of language, words are inadequate to describe what is seen. The only possibility for totalization is by a sensual correlation between what the heroine, Juliette, calls the “physical clarity of things” and their connection with thoughts.

Typical of every Romantic notion since Schopenhauer, the world is viewed as an interpreted situation determined by our will, interests, and

desire to reach the object outside ourselves. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty summed up this Romantic double bind and its appropriateness as the subject of film. He echoes the sentiments of Godard and Eisenstein:

“Phenomenological or existential philosophy is largely an expression of surprise at the inherence of the self in the world and in others, a description of this paradox and permeation, and an attempt to make us see the bond between subject and others ... the movies are peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other.”(4)

The desire to force the film and the mental processes into a more physical connection with reality (in this case, political action) is central in Godard's film, *LE GAI SAVOIR* (1969). The film personifies “the search for structures.” This search involves Godard in a separation of the formal elements and a breakdown of their component parts, so that in isolating them we can observe the tension they create in their montage battle. The film is Godard's own *Film Form* and *Film Sense*, pedagogically and cinematically. The image and sound track is a compendium of Eisensteinian montages, within shots, between shots, and between images and sounds. The text of the film is a theoretical discussion of method. Like Eisenstein, there are three steps, A+B=C, the collection of images and sounds, the analysis and breakdown of images and sounds, and the new models based on the discovery.

LE GAI SAVOIR (or *The Joy of Learning*)(5) was originally commissioned by French Television to be a modern version of Rousseau's treatise on education, *Émile* (1762). It is a non-narrative film, perhaps the most abstract and formally elegant film by Godard. It is strikingly beautiful visually, with two attractive young characters, Patricia Lumumba (Juliette Bertho) and Émile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Leaud). These two exist throughout the film in a black, limbo-like void, assumedly the space of a TV studio. It is, however, a highly ambiguous space since the two characters appear to be both performers in and spectators of a TV program. They discourse animatedly and philosophically on the nature of language, its outworn ineffectiveness for radicalization, and the need to create new associations. At the same time, the camera cuts to fragments of the cultural mythology—Paris streets, cartoons, pop posters, literary texts. The sound track, important to the film, is extremely varied—there are radio/ TV noises, rally chantings, revolutionary songs, a Mozart piano piece, and a host of discordant unclear sounds.

Godard uses a number of strategies, accompanying each with a discourse on method:

- a. *Word and image montage*: detachment of words from their meanings and associations with images.
- b. *Sound montage*: analysis of sound as a separate entity and as it functions in relation to the image, to silence, to the speaking voice and

to the spatiotemporal location in which it is heard,
c. *Spatial montage*: the function of the black space, especially with relation to the viewer, to the idea of zero and as a tabula rasa of the transformation of the mental processes effected by cinema/TV means.
d. *Role montage*: various reflective consciousnesses of the characters.

WORD AND IMAGE MONTAGE

One of the methods by which Godard indicates his mistrust of words and his desire to subvert our preconceptions based on the connotations of words is what he calls the “cinetract”:

“Take a photo and statement by Lenin or Che, divide the sentence into ten parts, one word per image, then add the photo that corresponds to the meaning either with or against it.”(6)

According to Godard, the cinetract’s function is to agitate and to start group discussions. He uses this device of montage within the shot and between shots throughout *LE GAI SAVOIR*. Graffiti-like words subvert the text against which they are placed or serve as directional signs to us to rethink our associations with them. The words are detached from their meanings and function plastically. They also serve as signals reinforcing political action or the reformulation of ideas. In fact, suspended as they are against a pop cartoon, revolutionary poster or philosophical text, the words serve an affective function: they almost scream out for enactment of their meanings. Although in ironic conflict with the images, in an effort to demythologize, the words have a continuity of significance. They usually refer to cognitive-perceptual processes, to political ideology or to the language of logic or philosophy.

For example, the two characters, in their interest to dissolve images and sound, begin to break down the words *CINEMA-TELEVISION* into their component letters. Simultaneously a cinetract appears, increasing the process of dissolution already initiated by the dialogue. Words like *savoir* (to know), *voir* (to see), *les elements de* (elements of), *le gai savoir* (the joy of learning), juxtaposed against a book jacket cover, or a Tom and Jerry cartoon, emphasize and punctuate the need for rethinking.

The discussion which follows this sequence is a dialogue à la Eisensteinian theory. Patricia claims that any image can radicalize since chance and the unconscious are structured similarly. Émile says, in an image, that we must find the method. Patricia answers that we must find the discourse of its method and ours at the same time. The implication is not only that diverse and arbitrary elements are the same as thinking, both conscious and unconscious, but that by an analysis and breakdown of the elements, we will discover our own methods of thinking. For Eisenstein, as for Godard, the discovery of common properties in a series of different facts will constitute a new unity and a new way of thinking more representative of human consciousness.

To divorce language from conventional meanings is basic to the wish to transform conventional ideas about love, art and politics. It is a particular preoccupation of Godard's, as in *LA CHINOISE*, when Veronique and Guillaume want to renew the energies of words by separating out their sounds and matter.

SOUND MONTAGE

In the sound montage of *LE GAI SAVOIR* there is a simultaneous exchange of methodological discussions and practical models for the rethinking and the recombination of sound. Besides the many voices and noises, there is a detachment of sound from meaning and from the people who speak. There is a forcing of a resemblance of sound with its physical connections, not just for onomatopoeic effects but as if to establish the sound as an object occupying space. Along with sound detachment from image, there is image without sound—for example, in the documentary flashes of Paris streets when ordinarily there would be traffic and other urban noises or during moments of extreme anguish over political violence for which words are inadequate.

The deconstruction of sound and the examination of all texts and discourses by the whispered consciousness bear a strong resemblance to Eisenstein's description of the sound-image montages of the Joycean inner monologue. In fact, *LE GAI SAVOIR* fits the description better than Eisenstein's own inner monologue attempts in his film script for Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*.⁽⁷⁾ Although admittedly only in preliminary form and dealing with more stodgy material, Eisenstein's script for *An American Tragedy* is a combination of literary impressionism within a naturalistic narrative. In Clyde's thoughts in the "kill-don't kill" sequences, it is more a question of will disputing with its own conscience than of an artistic consciousness yearning for a dissolution of self into the objective world. In no way does it approximate Eisenstein's own notion of the Joycean monologue, which he described as the "whole course of thought through a disturbed mind."⁽⁸⁾

Godard's blizzard of sound montage can be understood by the question he posed during an interview with Robert Bresson about Bresson's film *AU HASARD BALTHASAR*:

"Bresson: ... every time that I can replace an image by a sound, I do so. And I do so more and more."

"Godard: And if you could replace all the images by sounds ... an inversion of the functions of the image and of the sound. One could have the image, of course, but it would be the sound that would be the significant element."⁽⁹⁾

So too a "significant element" in *LE GAI SAVOIR* is sound, and it is integral to every context in the film. One such context is Rousseau's *Émile*, not only because of the film's relationship to Rousseau's tract on re-education and the reformulation of ideas, but because of Rousseau's

belief in the myth of original innocence and of first things, which includes first sounds. In fact, the search for a method by an analysis of thought and sensual processes relates to a number of notions of Zero and first things in both Rousseau's philosophy and in LE GAI SAVOIR. Rousseau condemned writing, said he hated books (except for *Robinson Crusoe*, that is) and favored the oral language or voice over *écriture*. For him, the self is separated from the written word, but the authentic self is present in the speaking voice.

In LE GAI SAVOIR there is a constant tension between the dissolution of cultural mythologies like language and texts and a return to beginnings, where the idea of sound or silence in relation to some authentic self and the notion of the integrity of oral language are to be re-established. There is a direct reference to this when Patricia says Rousseau understood that the voice is the best expression of liberty and free sounds. At this point the camera zooms in on a young girl's eye with an accompanying statement that the eye must hear before looking. In other words, because of its intimate connection with sound, the image has usurped the principal role. Therefore, we must rethink sounds, not reproduce them.

SPACE AND ROLE MONTAGE

An intricate space and role montage contributes to a redefinition of the cinema/ TV process as a methodological device for the reformulation of ideas.⁽¹⁰⁾ It is a classical space in which the unities of time, place, action and character are rigorously enforced. It is a space that functions as a TV studio, as a stage, as a circular arena for mental and physical gymnastics and as an infinite space symbolic of néant (nothingness) or the beginning of time. Because it lacks architectural and graphic guidelines, the black space in which the characters perform has an unlimited definition. The sense of continuity between the frame of the screen and off-screen space endows the characters with a three-dimensional immediacy of presence. It is a space that permits the characters a complicated interchange between each other, reflections of themselves, their roles on screen, in real life, and as spectators as well as actors. In a sense, they and we are suspended in off-screen space into which we as spectators and they as spectators/actors move in an exchange with images and sounds that appear in that same space, all working either with or against each other:

“The movie is not on screen. The movie stems from moving. The move from the reality to the screen and back to reality. And the screens are nothing, just shades ... When you arrive it's the moviemaker; and when you start, it's the spectator.”⁽¹¹⁾

Spectator/ actor, teacher/ student, we and the characters coexist in a space that is the ultimate in Eisenstein's strategy of inferential exchange between the viewer and the didactic message on the screen.

All the transfers in the film—between image, sound and silence; between

words, meanings and objective political realities; between ambiguous space, the surface of the screen and the varied roles enacted on it—represent Godard's notes towards a supreme fiction. Everything refers back to the final paradoxical illusion. This is a film "*en train de se faire*" (in the process of creation) which begins with a breakdown of filmic elements and ends with a wishful projection of what a film should be. The problem to solve—the one that has been called into question throughout by a series of formal involvements with genre distortions, movements in and out of contexts and systems of thoughts, satirizations of discourses, and different levels of reflecting consciousnesses—is the pushing of the film as tool into political action and the pulling of it back into the realm of art.

In contrast with Eisenstein's logical argument pattern, by which logically deduced relations between shots create new associations, Godard tends to emphasize the paradoxical irresolution of the artistic consciousness and human action. He effects it in at least three ways:

1. His reflexivity, both in his inclusion of a discourse on method for the creation of new paradigms for thought, and in his intense dedication to the analysis and breakdown of the filmic process.
2. Abstraction and reduction of narrative elements. (See Eisenstein's retraction of the Joycean method in *Film Sense*, p. 11 and p. 185. Eisenstein felt the tendency to abstraction in the Joycean monologue would concentrate more on means than content and would become self-destructive.)
3. Incorporation of all kinds of discourses, traditions and modes (which Eisenstein felt a dangerous stretching of the limitations of the art form).

Godard's motives, however, are precisely those of Eisenstein's. The range of semiotic significances involved in the inherence and confrontation of the subjective self with its objective reality and its formal constructs of language and culture must be recombined to produce a change of thought.

As Émile says, balancing on a tightrope as if poised on a Hegelian dialectic:

“A constant between man's [sic] biological nature and the construction of his [sic] intelligence must be established.”

Notes

[1.](#) “What I am doing is making the spectator share the arbitrary nature of my choices, and the quest for general rules which might justify a particular course.” *Godard on Godard* (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 239.

[2.](#) Eisenstein, *Film Form*, p. 105.

[3.](#) *Godard on Godard*, p. 242.

- [4.](#) Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology," *Sense and Nonsense*, (Northwestern University, 1964), p. 58.
- [5.](#) Coined by Nietzsche in 1882, from his treatise called *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, which deals also with the re-education of a 19th century sensibility.
- [6.](#) Godard interview, *Kino-Praxis* (Berkeley, California, 1968).
- [7.](#) Eisenstein, *Film Form*, pp. 97-104, and *Film Sense*, pp. 236-242.
- [8.](#) *Film Form*, p. 104.
- [9.](#) "Interview with Robert Bresson," *Cahiers du cinéma* in English, No. 8, Feb. 1967, p. 8.
- [10.](#) Godard's definition of a militant film. The screen is a "blackboard or the wall of a classroom that presents the concrete analysis of a concrete situation." *Kino-Praxis*.
- [11.](#) Ibid.

Images of minority and foreign groups in American films: 1958-73

by Patricia Erens

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[Editor's note: This is the first of two essays by Erens on "Minorities in U.S. Film." [Part Two](#) appears in *Jump Cut*, no. 8.]

Sometime during the 60s "the melting pot" boiled over. Blacks informed the world that "black is beautiful" and sobered many liberals by refusing to support the notion of one United States. Subsequently, analysts began reassess the melting pot theory, noting the failure of some groups to assimilate into the greater mass. At the same time, other minority groups awoke to the erosion of their once vital ethnic life which accompanied their assimilation. Poles, Jews, Italians once again began to accent the features which distinguished them as individual groups within the community. Suddenly words like "assimilation" and "melting pot" were replaced by "acculturation" and "pluralism."

Naturally these new attitudes were reflected in U.S. movies. Films began to focus on the diversity of the U.S. experience. *THE GODFATHER*, *PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT*, and *CLAUDINE* emphasized how ethnic life differed from group to group. Many films aimed at complex portrayals, both positive and negative, in an effort to define cultural differences on their own terms. In an effort to follow fashion, many films simply supplied new stereotypes to replace older ones.

Because of the flavor of ethnicity in recent Hollywood cinema, the period provides a rich source for research. The question naturally arises as to whether the new images are more truthful or not, and if not, why not? Before suggesting possible approaches to this problem, it seems worthwhile to look briefly at some general trends.

In the last fifteen years, the fortunes of various groups have shifted around a bit. Indians are now the good guys; white cowboys the villains (*CHEYENNE AUTUMN*, *SOLDIER BLUE*, *LITTLE BIG MAN*). Blacks are men of action, not servants. And as superheroes, several turn the tables as Whitey now gets his (*SHAFT*, *HIT*, *SLAUGHTER*). Black

women are mean mammas, not maids (FOXY BROWN, CLEOPATRA JONES). Germans no longer appear as rapist Huns (although many are still portrayed as sadistic or psychotic as in TWILIGHT PEOPLE and THE ODESSA FILE), nor Japanese as beady-eyed. But Italians are still gangsters (THE VALACHI PAPERS, THE GODFATHER, CAPONE) and Jewish males still have “Jewish mothers” (MINNIE AND MOSCOWITZ, WHERE'S POPPA, PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT).

In the past some Hollywood directors, like Elia Kazan and producers like Stanley Kramer and Darryl F. Zanuck, attempted to dramatize social issues pertaining to race and prejudice. However, films like HOME OF THE BRAVE, PINKY, GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT, and JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG constitute a fraction of the movies released each year. The vast majority of films continue to utilize stereotypes.

In 1949 Siegfried Kracauer confronted just such a problem in an article entitled “National Types as Hollywood Presents Them.” Composed close upon the heels of a devastating global war and during a period that still held out hope for John Grierson's notions of universal brotherhood and international understanding through film, Kracauer proposed an “analysis of the conception which the people of one nation entertain of their own and other nations.” Following a paradigmatic presentation of British and Russian characters in U.S. movies, Kracauer closed with a plea for greater objectivity—portraits rather than projections.

Few film critics today would endorse Grierson's concept of a moral cinema or Kracauer's belief in film as a vehicle for national understanding. Yet analysts continue to study and comment on the effects of film as a major component of the mass media. It seems to me, whether one assumes that film changes opinions or merely reinforces preexisting attitudes, that there are two approaches for dealing with the presentation of minority groups in film. Films can be viewed as a means of collecting objective data about minority images, specifically who does what to whom, how and when and the ways these images change according to political exigencies. In this case, interest revolves around *why*. The purpose of such an analysis is to gain insight into the continued needs and motivations of film creators and film viewers.

Kracauer was quite correct in stating that images of national types derive both from objective information gained through fact and from subjective biases perceived from environmental influences. The first approach relies on the objective determination of stereotypical tendencies which exist in the portrayal of each group and the relationship between these tendencies and the political realities of U.S. society.

It hardly needs to be reiterated on the pages of JUMP CUT that all films are politically based, either explicitly or implicitly. A film need not be a serious drama to posit a political bias (e.g., Charles Eckert's article “Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller,” No. 2, July-Aug., 1974). Entertainment films from Disney to Kung Fu are fraught with political ideology for anyone caring to decode the film. Thus Disney and Co. was

one of the first to go to war, lending expertise to the “Why We Fight” series and creating cartoons with anti-Nazi themes. All films propagandize for some cause. The majority of Hollywood films (in fact, the national cinema of any country) invariably reflects the dominant political and social ideas of the ruling class—the group that holds the reins of power.

With this in mind it would be fruitful to examine the following films from a Marxist point of view. There is little doubt that certain groups have suffered more than others from misrepresentation on the U.S. screen. An in-depth analysis of each minority is necessary to determine how individual screen images are affected by the shifting of groups within the socioeconomic structure and the changing of political priorities on the federal level.

The second approach to studying ethnic groups in film deals with the interpretation of subjective prejudices inherent in national images from a psychological point of view. Its aim is to determine how United States reveals itself in portrayals of “the others.” To accomplish this, it is necessary to confront the nature of cinema and the film-going experience. Despite Kracauer and Bazin’s insistence on photographic realism (later the “illusion of realism”) as the ontological essence of cinema, no one can deny the magic which occurs when familiar images from our ordinary environment flash upon the screen in a darkened room. The magical images reflect fantasies—distortions—but truths of another sort. And as Kracauer has pointed out, these are not the personal fantasies of film producers and directors which are subsequently foisted upon a passive U.S. public. “The film industry is forced by its profit interest to divine the nature of actually existing mass trends and to adjust its products to them.” Hollywood cannot shove films down the throats of unwilling audiences, no matter how many millions of dollars they spend on publicity campaigns (example, *THE GREAT GATSBY*). This is not to deny Hollywood’s influence or responsibility, but rather to establish the interrelation between film production and film consumption.

The film-going experience is a shared experience—one in which the fantasies of both creator and viewer merge. As such, popular film—Hollywood film—can reveal a great deal about the U.S. public—its attitudes, its desires, its fears. The study of ethnic minorities in the movies thus tells us as much about the dominant society as about the portrayed groups. Like dream analysis, the more distorted an image, the greater the need for interpretation. Such a psychoanalytic approach needs to be applied to film, along the lines of Wolfenstein and Leites’ fine work on the melodramas of the 40s in *Movies: Psychological Study*

A psychological approach raises questions with regard to universal myths and figures in film narratives, especially genre films. Because genre films depend on formulas, types (persons possessing distinct features which mark them as members of an identifiable group) play an

important role in the work, often performing specific and predetermined functions. Controversy begins when types evolve, into stereotypes (characters which conform to simplified and often repeated patterns of depiction). Films would be poor indeed without policemen, bartenders, or hookers, all familiar types on the U.S. screen. However, defamation begins when all policemen are portrayed as ignorant rednecks, all bartenders as gregarians, and all hookers as doormats with hearts of gold. Likewise, objections are raised when the majority of screen Jews are brainy or money mad, blacks are hip, and Italians violent. For despite the fact that such portrayals provide relative truths or emphasize sympathetic qualities, the presentation of such limited characterizations, frozen into convention, remains detrimental to individual groups and socially demeaning.

However, the persistence of types and stereotypes in film, with and without the enforcement of censorship codes, indicates that the need for such depictions exist deep with peoples need for storytelling. Like other forms of psychic phenomena, manifestations disappear only to reappear in another guise until the basic impulse is altered. (Thus archetypal villains persist although they are represented by different minority groups at different times.) Before any significant changes can occur, it is necessary to understand what recurring patterns and character distortions actually signify. In some cases, history as well as psychology need be applied.

Images of group oppression and national prejudice have been rampant throughout U.S. film history. With the implementation of the Motion Picture Production Code in the early 30s, gross excesses were eliminated. The Code prohibited the use of such words as chink, dago, frog, greaser, hunkie, kike, nigger, spic, wop, and yid. The Code also specified, "The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of all nations shall be represented fairly." However, such vague pronouncements allowed for wide variations, and national character was murdered monthly in millions of subtle ways. Although many minority groups raised objections and organized lobby groups to combat such negative portrayals, these efforts have not always been successful.

As Americans, few relish censorship restrictions which grate against the long cherished notions of freedom of speech. If change is to occur it will have to come through public awareness, backed by dollars at the box-office. Only when audiences demonstrate an unwillingness to buy demeaning stereotypes will film producers be willing to innovate changes.

Intelligent analysis of the depiction of minority groups on the screen can serve as a valuable educational tool for stimulating sensitivity. To date, only the black experience has been fully documented. As yet no voices speak for the Latinos, the Germans, the Jews—no published books document their history and image on the U.S. screen.

Much work lies ahead. As classes in film, mass communication, and ethnic studies appear in schools and colleges, it seem important that

students confront stereotypical images as well as complex portrayals in order to comprehend recurring distortions and latent implications in screen characterizations.

With this in mind the following filmography (which will appear in two parts) lists the major U.S. films dealing with ethnic minorities during the past fifteen years. No effort was made to distinguish between groups living within United States and foreigners in other countries, as biases and distortions apply to both film portrayals. The listings are as follows: Greeks, American Indians, Irish, Italians, Jews, Latinos (including Mexicans), Orientals (including Japanese), Polish, Scandinavians, and Russians. I have not chosen to list films about blacks, since there are several comprehensive studies on the subject (see bibliography).

Each film is accompanied by brief summary indicating the dominant narrative and the major ethnic role. A few films contain several important ethnic roles and have been included twice under different headings. Wherever significant, I have included the names of actors and actresses.

The majority of the films are available for rental in 16 mm, and distributors are indicated. Several films are not yet in 16 mm distribution or have been withdrawn. The latter works were included as they occasionally appear on television.

Films were chosen among all the popular genres—westerns, gangster films, detective stories, war stories, horror films—as well as dramas and comedies. Almost all of the films are commercial features made in Hollywood; a smattering are co-productions filmed abroad. I have included some independent productions, mostly semi-documentaries. Otherwise, short works and documentaries have been excluded, as well as films made for television.

From a quick glance down the list it is apparent that many categories are dominated by one genre. Thus most Indians and Mexicans appear in westerns, most Italians in gangster films and comedies, and most Japanese and Germans in WW2 war films.

Obviously not all films with ethnic characters could be included. Minor characters appear in hundreds of films, and choices had to be made. But by and large, I have aimed to be as inclusive as possible. Thus, from *GIDGET GOES TO ROME* to *THE GODFATHER* and from *DARBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE* to *THE LAST HURRAH*, the filmography represents a good cross-section of how the United States has portrayed its ethnic minorities and foreigners in the last decade and a half.

1. BOOKS AND ARTICLES

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2. GERMANS

THE BIG SHOW (James B. Clark, 1961). Melodrama about traveling German circus and despotic owner. MOD

THE BLUE ANGEL (Edward Dmytryk, 1959). Remake of famous Von Sternberg film, updated to Germany, 1956. with May Britt in Dietrich role. FI

CABARET (Bob Fosse, 1972). Screen version of kooky U.S. lass living in Berlin as Nazism gains political ascendancy.

THE COUNTERFEIT TRAITOR (George Seaton, 1962). Story of American-born Swede (William Holden) who works as German counterspy for Americans during WWII. Filmed in West Berlin and Hamburg. FI

COUNTERPOINT (Ralph Nelson, 1968). Suspense drama of U.S. symphony of seventy men who are captured by a German Panzer division and music-loving Nazi (Maximilian Schell). DID, CLW, SWA, UNIV

FIVE-FINGER EXERCISE (Daniel Mann, 1962). Film about response of U.S. family to presence of German refugee (Maximilian Schell) who comes to tutor their 15-year-old daughter. FC, MOD

THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE (Vincente Minnelli 1962). Reworking of 1921 classic about fight of young Argentineans against rise of Nazism in 1930's Germany. FI

HELL'S BLOODY DEVILS (Al Adamson. 1971). Adventure story of efforts of former Nazi to further neo-Nazism in United States with help of Mafia.

I AIM AT THE STARS (J. Lee Thompson, 1960). Film biography of German scientist Werner von Braun as played by Curt Jurgens. BUD, PC

IN ENEMY COUNTRY (Harry Keller, 19GB). Spy story of pretty French damsel who marries German Baron to get info for French underground. GIN, CLW, UNIV

JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG (Stanley Kramer, 1961). Re-creation of international war crimes trials following WWII which raises question of guilt and responsibility. UA

LISA (Philip Dunne, 1962). Story of Auschwitz survivor and ex-Nazi who promises to help her get to Palestine. FI

A MAN CALLED DAGGER (Richard Rush, 1968). Lively adventure film about U.S. investigation of meat-packer suspected of being former SS colonel. FI

MAN ON A STRING (Andre de Toth, 1960). Espionage film with partial setting in West Berlin. CIN, CLW, MOD. TRANS

THE McKENZIE BREAK (Lamont Johnson, 1970). Drama of attempted prison escape by members of a German U-boat crew. UA

ONE, TWO, THREE (Billy Wilder, 1961). Wild comedy of modern situation in divided Berlin. UA

RAID ON ROMMEL (Henry Hathaway, 1971). Another episode in efforts to defeat the "desert fox." CIN, CLW, UNIV

SHIP OF FOOLS (Stanley Kramer, 1965). Mixed group of people on board ship headed for Bremen during 30s. Group includes several Germans, including a Nazi sympathizer (Jose Ferrer). BUD, CIN, CLW, MOD, SWA, TWY, UNIV

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (George Roy Hill, 1972). Adaptation of Vonnegut novel about Everyman Billy Pilgrim and his experiences as German prisoner of war, SWA, UNIV

36 HOURS (George Seaton, 1965). Suspense story of efforts of German intelligence to pry top-secrets from U.S. double-agent by an elaborate trick carried out in Germany. FI

TOBRUK (Arthur Miller, 1967). War film about German Jews who collaborate with British to defeat Rommel in Egypt. CIN, CLW, UNIV

TORN CURTAIN (Alfred Hitchcock, 1966). Thriller about international espionage set in East Germany. GIN, CLW, TWY, OF, NC, SWA

TOWN WITHOUT PITY (Gottfried Reinhardt, 1961). Drama of trial of four U.S. soldiers accused of raping a 16-year-old German girl in Neustadt. UA

THE TRAIN (John Frankenheimer, 1965). Thriller about efforts of Germans to remove art treasures from Paris in 1944 as the Allies advance while the French Resistance tries to intercept the cargo. UA

THE TWILIGHT PEOPLE (Eddie Romero, 1972). Story of mad former SS officer who wants to create a super-race by means of surgical transplants.

VERBOTEN! (Samuel Fuller, 1959). Film depicting marriage between U.S. GI and German girl and their struggle against unreconciled Hitler youths in postwar Germany. UF

THE YOUNG LIONS (Edward Dmytryk, 1958). Adaptation of Irwin Shaw novel with Marlon Branch in role of disillusioned Nazi lieutenant. FI

3. GREEKS

AMERICA, AMERICA (Elia Kazan, 1963). Drama of young man's arduous efforts to

reach the land of promise in United States. WB

ANDY (Richard C. Sarafian, 1965). Film about problems of Greek immigrant family with forty-year-old retarded son. UNIV

BEEN DOWN SO LONG IT LOOKS LIKE UP TO ME (Jeff Young, 1971). Adaptation of novel of disenchanted Greek American and his life in the drug culture on and off campuses.

A DREAM OF KINGS (Daniel Mann, 1969). Story of father's efforts to find money to take sick son back to native Greece. Anthony Quinn stars in Petrakis story set in Chicago's Greektown. SWA

THE EXORCIST (Richard Freidkin, 1973). Modern day horror film of efforts of young Greek priest to exorcise devil from body of young girl.

THE GUNS OF NAVARONE (J. Lee Thompson, 1961), Thriller about group of Americans trapped on small island in the Aegean Sea during WWII. With Anthony Quinn and Irene Papas. AB, BUD, CLII, DIN, MOD, TRANS. WC, NAT. SWA

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER (Robert Ellis Miller, 1968). Screen version of story by Carson McCullers about deaf-mute and Greek retarded friend. WB

THE MAGUS (Guy Green, 1968). Complex drama of riddles on small Greek island which involves a young English school teacher and an older wealthy Greek (Anthony Quinn). FI

THE MOON-SPINNERS (James Nelson, 1964). Adventure melodrama about corrupt Greek (Eli Wallach), Filmed in Crete. DIN, NAT, SWA, TWY

4. INDIANS

THE ANIMALS (Ron Joy, 1972). Drama of unending revenge which begins with rape of white woman by white outlaw. Indian helps her even the score. AB

APACHE RIFLES (William H. Witney, 1964). Problems with vengeful Apaches and farmers in Arizona 1879 and how two men establish trust across racial boundaries. FI

THE APPALOOSA (Sidney J. Furie. 1966). Story of buffalo hunter who wins beautiful girl from Mexican bandit. CIN, UNIV. WC

BILLY JACK (T.C. Frank, 1971). Story of youth hero halfbreed who devotes life to establishing justice according to own code. WB

BUCK AND THE PREACHER (Sidney Poitier, 1972). Western focusing on plight of black Union soldier after Civil War, involving Indians' fight with white men.

CANCEL MY RESERVATION (Paul Bogart, 1972). Comedy about murdered Indian girl, 110-year-old Indian mystic and stolen Indian property.

CHATO'S LAND (Michael Winner, 1972). Adventure story of pursuit and revenge as white men chase Apache halfbreed (Charles Bronson) who was provoked into killing a white sheriff. UA

CHEYENNE AUTUMN (John Ford. 1964). Sympathetic treatment of Indians' long trek back to their homeland when U.S. government fails to meet promises. AB, BUD, CLW, SWA, TWY, NAT, WC

CHUKA (Gordon Douglas, 1967). Adventure story of conflict between Americans and Arapaho Indians. FI

THE COWBOYS (Mark Rydell, 1972). Western about older rancher (Wayne) which involves gradual transition of adolescent halfbreed,

CRY BLOOD, APACHE (Jack Starrett, 1971). Western Romance involving the search for gold with Indian maid's helping while her brother seeks revenge.

DUEL AT DIABLO (Ralph Nelson, 1966). Western about life of white woman who had been Apache captive for more than a year. UA

EL CONDOR (John Guillermin, 1970). Adventure story of search for Maximilian's hidden treasure by two adventurers and a group of renegade Apaches. SWA

THE GATLING GUN (Robert Gordon, 1971). Western about conflict between Union soldiers and Apaches over ownership of a Gatling gun.

HOMBRE (Martin Ritz, 1967). Story of white hero (Paul Newman) called Hombre who was raised by Apache Indians. FI

ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS (James B. Clark, 1964). Children's film about Indian brother and sister's efforts to survive alone on an island off the coast of California. DIN, CLW, UNIV

JEREMIAH JOHNSON (Sydney Pollack). Story of a mountain man who learns to live among and fight against the Flatheads and the Crow. Very accurate in the depiction of Indian customs. WB

JOHNNY TIGER (Paul Wenkos, 1966). Drama of white man's flight to help backward Seminoles on Florida reservation and emergence of halfbreed to position of leadership. DIN, UNIV

JOURNEY THROUGH ROSEBUD (Tom Gries, 1972). Film about contemporary plight and embitterment of contemporary Sioux on South Dakota reservation. SWA

THE LEGEND OF NIGGER CHARLEY (Martin Goldman, 1972). Story of former black slave and relationship with homesteader's halfbreed wife. FI

LITTLE BIG MAN (Arthur Penn, 1970). A comic epic about a 120-year-old survivor of Custer's Last Stand who recounts his childhood among the Cheyenne. SWA

THE LONERS (Sutton Roley, 1972). Story of manhunt for young halfbreed (Dean Stockell) who is falsely accused of trying to kill a white man. PRY

MACKENNA'S GOLD (J. Lee Thompson, 1969). Western about search for horde of gold over which brood vengeful Apache gods. AB, CLW, MOD, TWY, CIN, BUD, NAT, WC, SWA

MADRON (Jerry Hopper, 1971). Western about fight of gunslinger and French Canadian nun against the Apaches. WC

A MAN CALLED HORSE (Elliot Silverstein, 1970). Story of Englishman captured by Sioux Indians during 19th century and his eventual initiation into the tribe. SWA

THE McMASTERS (Alf Kielin, 1970). A post-Civil War western about a group of Indians who save a black man from angry white settlers. NC

NEVADA SMITH (Henry Hathaway, 1966). Western about halfbreed (Steve McQueen) who gets aid from various Indian women in his search for a new life. FI

OKLAHOMA CRUDE (Sidney Kramer, 1973). Story of young girl and Indian helper who run a wildcat oil rig in Oklahoma in 1913.

THE OUTSIDER (Delbert Mann, 1962). Story of shy Pima Indian (Tony Curtis) and his experiences in Marine Corps, as a national hero, and his battle with alcohol. UNIV, WC

RID CONCHOS (Gordon Douglas, 1964). Western concerning stolen rifles. Apache Indians, and an Indian-hating hero. FI

THE SAVAGE SEVEN (Richard Rush, 1968). Violent film about life of American Indians in small California town where natives are victimized by both greedy businessmen and motorcycle gang alike. OF

SOLDIER BLUE (Ralph Nelson, 1970). Bloody film about savage Indian attack on cavalry and later revenge by white men. CLW, OF

THE STALKING MOON (Robert Mulligan, 1969). Story of U.S. woman who was Apache captive for ten years and struggle to escape with halfbreed son from Arizona Territory in 1880s.

STAY AWAY JOE (Peter Tewksbury, 1968). Comedy about brawling halfbreed (Elvis Presley) and trouble in Arizona. FI

STRANGE VENGEANCE (Jack Starrett, 1972). Murder story involving teenage halfbreed and her attachment to young white boy,

ULZANA'S RAID (Robert Aldrich, 1972). Harsh treatment of struggle between Apaches on the war path and the 115 Cavalry who tries to protect the homesteaders. DIN, CLW, UNIV

WHEN LEGENDS DIE (Stuart Millar, 1972). Story of 12-year-old Ute sent to a Colorado reservation to learn new ways. Eventually he rejects this life and returns to the wilderness. FI

THE WILD COUNTRY (Robert Totten, 1971). Western about family settlers, mountain men. and a Shoshone Indian companion.

5. IRISH

THE CARDINAL (Otto Preminger, 1963). Story of arrogant young Catholic Bostonian in early 20th century who reforms and rises to ranks of cardinal. AB, MOD, CIN, CLW, FC, SWA, TWY

DARBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE (Robert Stevenson, 1959). Disney production about Irish storyteller at turn of the century.

EAGLE IN A CAGE (Fielder Cook, 1972). Historical drama about Napoleon on St. Helena and Irish doctor who cares for and admires the little corporal. SWA

FINIAN'S RAINBOW (Francis Ford Coppola, 1968). Screen version of Irish musical about life in United States and leprechaun's gold. AB, BUD, CLW, MOD, NAT, SWA, MR, TWY, UF, WC

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER (Stanley Kramer). Problems of interracial marriage between black man (Sidney Poitier) and daughter of Irish Catholic family. AB, BUD, CLW, COL, FC, TWY

THE LAST HURRAH (John Ford, 1958). Story of old-time Irish-American politician (Spencer Tracy) who loses re-election for mayor but gains insights instead. AB, CIN, CON, FC, TRANS, BUD, MOD, CLW, TWY, WC

A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT (Sidney Lumet, 1962). Film version of Eugene O'Neill play about his Irish-Catholic upbringing. AB, CIN, MOO, WC, FC, OF

LOVERS AND OTHER STRANGERS (Cy Howard, 1970). Comedy romance about the American Irish and the American Italians. FI

THE LUCK OF GINGER COFFEY (Irvin Kershner, 1964). Story of Irish emigrant who moves to Canada with his wife to find a better life. WR

THE MIRACLE WORKER (Arthur Penn, 1962). Story of Annie Sullivan and her work with the young Helen Keller. UA

THE MOLLY MAGUIRES (Martin Ritt, 1970). Story of secret organization of Irish American miners who sought to better their pay in second half of 19th century. BE

NEVER STEAL ANYTHING SMALL (Charles Lederer, 1959). Story of union boss who aims for bigger things. Given flavor by James Cagney in star role. UNIV

QUACKSER FORTUNE HAS A COUSIN IN THE BRONX (Waris Hussein, 1970). Romance about Irish immigrant (Gene Wilder) (who sells manure) and U.S. woman.

SAY ONE FOR ME (Frank Tashlin, 1959). Wry story of Irish priest (Bing Crosby) who saves souls in New York's theatrical district. AB, WC, DIN, MOD, NAT, SWA, OF

STUDS LONIGAN (Irving Lerner, 1960). Adaptation of James Farrell's novel of young boy growing up on Chicago's South Side during 1920s. UA

WRATH OF GOD (Ralph Nelson, 1972). Adventure story of South American revolution in late 20s which involves stranded Irishman. FI

YOUNG CASSIDY (Jack Cardiff, 1965). A fictionalized biography of Sean O'Casey and his years as an Irish rebel and young playwright. FI

6. ITALIANS

ACROSS 110th STREET (Barry Shear, 1972). Cops and robbers film with New York police going after Mafia boss and paranoid son-in-law. UA

AL CAPONE (Richard Wilson, 1959). Bio-flick of famous gangster with Rod Steiger in key role, NOR

AN AMERICAN DREAM (Robert Gist, 1966). Story of TV commentator and run-in with Cosa Nostra.

THE BROTHERHOOD (Martin Ritt, 1969). Story of Italian American family and their involvement with the New York Mafia. Starring Kirk Douglas and Irene Papas. FI

BUONA SERA, MRS. CAMPBELL (Melvin Frank, 1969). Comedy about complications which result when three U.S. soldiers all claim paternity of Italian child. Filmed in Italy. UA

THE CATERED AFFAIR (Richard Brooks and Gore Vidal, 1956). Story of Italian mother's efforts to give her daughter the wedding she never had. FI

EVERY LITTLE CROOK AND NANNY (Cy Howard, 1972). Comedy about Mafia boss (Victor Mature) and smart nanny who raises his hellion son. FI

FIVE MILES TO MIDNIGHT (Anatole Litvak, 1963). Drama of sour marriage between Italian-born wife (Sophia Loren) and U.S. husband. UA

THE GAMBLERS (Ron Winston, 1969). Story of an U.S. gambler who intends to swindle a rich Italian in Dubrovnik. WB

THE GANG THAT COULDN'T SHOOT STRAIGHT (James Goldstone, 1971). Gangster comedy about Mafiosa in Brooklyn's Little Italy. FI

GIDGET GOES TO ROME (Paul Wendkos, 1963). Teen crush between Gidget and older Italian. AS, GIN, CLW, MOD, NAT, SWA, WC.

THE GODFATHER (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972). Saga of Mafia families in New York during 1940s. Much ethnic flavor. FI

HEAVY TRAFFIC (Ralph Bakshi, 1971). X-rated animated feature about Jewish-Italian cartoonist who comes into contact with Italian whores and underground figures.

A HOLE IN THE HEAD (Frank Capra, 1959). Comedy about Italian Americans living in Miami Beach, with Frank Sinatra as young man with big dreams. UA

A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME (Russell Rouse, 1964). Story about New York prostitution and involvement of Lucky Luciano (Cesar Romero). AB

HOW TO MURDER YOUR WIFE (Richard Quine, 1965). Comedy about efforts of once-happy bachelor to free himself of his wife. (He finds himself married to an Italian beauty the morning after a drunken binge.) UA

INSIDE THE MAFIA (Edward L. Cahn, 1959). Fictitious story which utilizes some real events to show what really goes on inside. UA

IT STARTED IN NAPLES (Melville Shavelson, 1960). Romance between a Philadelphia lawyer (Clark Gable) and a Neapolitan (Sophia Loren). Filmed on location. FI

JOHNNY COOL (William Asher, 1963). Story of Sicilian who comes to United States to carry out personal vendetta.

THE LAWYER (Sidney J. Furie, 1970). Courtroom drama of Italian lawyer. FI

LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA (Guy Green, 1962). Story of young Italian (George Hamilton) who falls in love with beautiful retarded U.S. girl. Filmed in Rome and Florence. FI

LOVE WITH THE PROPER STRANGER (Robert Mulligan, 1963). Comedy between free-soul, young U.S. man and Italian girl (Natalie wood) who discovers she's pregnant. FI

LOVERS AND OTHER STRANGERS (Cy Howard, 1970). Comedy romance about the American Italians and American Irish. FI

LOVE STORY (Arthur Hiller, 1970). Tragic romance about Harvardite and young Italian co-ed from Radcliffe. FI

MADE FOR EACH OTHER (Robert B. Bean, 1971). Semi-autobiographical comedy about the courtship and marriage of Italian writer Joseph Bologna and Jewish writer wife Renee Taylor. FI

MAN FROM O.R.G.Y. (James A. Hill, 1970). Comedy which is spoof of dirty movies with ethnic flavor.

MEAN STREETS (Martin Scorsese, 1973). Story of sensitive young man growing up amidst the realities of New York's Little Italy.

MERRY ANDREW (Michael Kidd, 1958). Typical Danny Kaye vehicle which portrays singing, dancing, and romance with Italian circus performer Pier Angeli. FI

PARTY GIRL (Nicholas Ray, 1958). Thirties gangster film with ultimate showdown between lawyer (Robert Taylor) and Italian boss (Lee J. Cobb). FI

RAW WIND IN EDEN (Richard Wilson, 195?). Drama and romance amidst background of remote Italian island. UNIV

THE ROMAN SPRING OF MRS. STONE (Jose Quintero. 1961). Story of aging actress who loses self over handsome, young Italian (Warren Beatty). AB, NAT, TWY

THE ST. VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE (Roger Corman, 1967). Re-enactment of famous murders with Jason Robarts in role of Al Capone. FI

THE SECRET WAR OF HARRY FRIGG (Jack Smight, 1968). Comedy about five captured American Allied generals who live in comfort and captivity in Italian villa. CIN, CLW, OF, UNIV. SWA

SEVEN HILLS OF ROME (Roy Rowland, 1958), Romance about U.S. singer (Mario Lanza) who finds love in Rome. FT

SLAUGHTER (Jack Starrett, 1972). Adventure story of black hero's revenge on Mafia boss and his henchmen.

STILETTO (Bernard Kowalski, 1969). Adventure film about Italian playboy who is paid assassin for New York Mafia. AB

THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES (Ken Annakin, 1965). Comedy about an international air race from London to Paris in 1910 which includes representatives from several countries including Italy. FI

TRICK BABY (Larry Yust. 1972). Black thriller with various underworld Italian characters. UNIV

THE VENETIAN AFFAIR (Jerry Thorpe, 1967). Adventure story filmed in Venice about aftermath of bombing of international Peace conference. FI

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE (Sidney Lumet, 1962). Screen version of Arthur Miller play about Italian-American life on the Brooklyn waterfront and family problems. WR

WEDDINGS AND BABIES (Morris Engel, 1960). Independent production about tribulations of Italian-American photographer on New York's lower East Side.

WOMAN TIMES SEVEN (Vittorio de Sica. 1967). Shirley MacLaine in seven roles of varying nationalities, including Italian. AEPC

[Filmography is continued in next issue. Go to [Part Two](#).]

DISTRIBUTORS

AB—MacMillan Audio Brandon. AEPC—Avco Embassy Pictures Corp.. BUD—Budget Films. CIN—Cine-Craft Co.. CLW—Clem Williaes Films, Inc.. COL—Columbia Cinemateque. CON—Contemporary Films/McGraw-Hill. FC—The Film Center. FI—Films Incorporated. HUR—Hurlock Line World. IMP—Impact Films. IVY—Ivy Films. MOO—Modern Sound Pictures, Inc.. NAT—National Film Service. RBC—NBC Films. SWA—Swank Motion Pictures, Inc.. TRANS- Trans-World Films. Inc.. TWY—Twyman Films, Inc.. UA—United Artists 16. UF—United Films. UNIV—Universal 16. UPA—United Productions. WB—Warner Bros., Inc.. WC—Westcoast Films. WR—Walter Reade 16

Metz and film semiotics: opening the field

by Sam Rohdie

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“There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean. Precisely what the first analysts of narrative were attempting: to see all the world’s stories ... within a single structure: we shall, they thought, extract from each tale its model, then out of these models we shall make a great narrative structure, which we shall reapply (for verification) to any one narrative: a task as exhausting ... as it is ultimately undesirable, for the text thereby loses its difference.”—Roland Barthes⁽¹⁾

A year ago, at a seminar at the British Film Institute centering on the work of Christian Metz and on cinesemiotics, a well-known critic spoke. Robin Wood found Metz insufficiently concrete, too concerned with abstract proposals, instead of with the actual analysis of “real” films. Wood himself has repeatedly stressed the organic quality of specific films—the singularity of the body of the text. “What does all this have to do with films?” Wood wanted to know. The suspicion was that he knew already in the very insistence of his demand to know what the “pay-off” was, what the “returns” of this theorizing were. Could it be “used,” “exploited” in filmic analysis?

Robin Wood, in his own work, had ceaselessly struggled to grasp the full meaning, the essential nature of individual films, their essence. Whatever that was for any given film, it related to the systematic structure of the film, the way it cohered, in short its coherence, the working out of elements and their finalization, closure, and resolution. The subject author, creator of the unique film, always stood as the fundament of this critic’s criticism. The film, in “the *final* analysis,” was the expression of the author and the author’s world. (The film as world. The film as representation. The representation of the world in film. The expression of the “truth” of the world. The “truth” of the film.) Behind the film, waiting to be recognized, waiting to tear the mask of the film

and to appear, was the filmmaker. Robin Wood's analysis was a reconstitution of the subjectivity of the author, and of the reader, the author's subjectivity, and ours. Robin Wood was in good company, and on familiar terrain.

It was right that Wood employed economic terms for his interrogation, criticism and pose of feigned incomprehension of Christian Metz and of cinesemiotics. It revealed a conception of the film as commodity, as product, or, in a different but related system, as fetish, as object of desire. The work of criticism was to possess, own, have, love, admire, worship, grasp that object. And it was the film's coherence which permitted such unseemly conduct, coherence which was the core and handle which desire might seize. If the film did not present in its structure such a defined hold, center (and many films do not, are incoherent, or at least de-centered), then a negative evaluation was applied. There appeared almost a terror, a sense of loss, at an inability to answer the query, "what is this film *about*?" as there was terror at the posing of this kind of question. What if it could not be possessed? What if it had no meaning?

This kind of criticism is a perversion. The model for it is the body. To call it organic is simply to point to the sexuality which informs it. The film text reconstituted by this critic is the body of the text, the Copy of the body, behind which, for ultimate possession, is a Hawks or a Hitchcock, a somebody indeed.

Curiously, a close reading of Christian Metz causes some wonder at the virulence with which Metz was rejected that evening. True, Metz fails to talk about "real," "living," "existing," "actual" films. But he does indicate, in the movement of his thought towards structure and the notion of the singularity of the system of the film text, assumptions not so far removed from a traditional organicism.

What is it that was so disturbing, that caused such impoliteness, such nastiness, those social signs of repressed English middle-class violence? In part, one purpose of this essay is to attempt to answer that question in a reading of Christian Metz' cinesemiotics, to name the threat posed by his work to traditional views despite the traditionalism of his own approach. But to anticipate ever so slightly something of the problematic involved, one relating not only to cinesemiotics, but to semiotics generally.

The problem for the organic critic (let us name some things for what they are) is the fact of the commonness of the body, and its uniqueness, film as both replica and reduplication, the copy of the model, and a singular entity. To posit a singular entity for a given film and to found that singularity in its coherence and system is to run the risk of sacrificing precisely the stake in the game. The unique film becomes common by the very fact of declaring its coherence—a common attribute. System becomes an essential feature of films. In that very gesture of proclaiming a singular uniqueness of the system, the uniqueness is destroyed. To rationalize this problematic of criticism too

far is to question the very project of that criticism. A contradiction is exposed at the very center of it, and the force of the contradiction further exposes the force of a desire. It is Metz' merit and of semiotics to make manifest this desire. Exhibitionism is one thing, to be exposed, to be caught with one's pants down, is quite another. It was not that this critic did not understand Metz, he understood only too well.

Christian Metz' cinesemiotics has been fully and sympathetically explicated.(2) No repetition of that exegesis is required, even less so with the appearance in English translation of most of Metz' major writings.(3) The response to these so far in the United States has been either piecemeal, over-detailed, basically irrelevant, or, it has been academic and scientific, that is, without value.(4) In France, semiotics has been subjected to serious rethinking and criticism by semioticians, whereas in the United States the semiotics which is the object of that criticism can hardly be said to have been established. This fact makes the task of analysis of cinesemiotics doubly difficult, for the terms of such an analysis presuppose the knowledge and effect of the semiotic activity.(5)

To characterize that activity here would only be to distort it. And it might too compromise an understanding of it by condensing and making abstract a work, a genuine activity, practice, production into what it is not—dogma, formula, Law.(6)

In the circumstances, a single aspect of Metz' cinesemiotics will be treated, that which most clearly relates to problems in traditional criticism, the point of the disturbance Metz causes to that criticism, and which at the same time opens, out into the areas of a critical semiotics. That point is the distinction opposition Metz poses of "text/textual system." (7)

The "text" is the actual film, "an object 'of the real world.'.. a given." The text is what the filmmaker (cineaste) creates. It is defined by its source. The text is fully manifest as real presence, attested process. The text is in the can, it really exists.

The "textual system" is the intelligibility of that reality (of "the text"). The textual system is not the text itself but its system, its structure. The textual system is constructed by the analyst from the text. The textual system is an abstract entity defined not by its source, but by its destination. It is distinct from the text as the text is distinct from the system of that text.

.. the text, as text, is distinct from any system, and even from the unique system of which it is the only text. And the system, even if unique, is distinct from any text, including its own."

"What the cineaste constructs is the text, while the analyst constructs the system." (8)

The text is an unique, real, singular object. The textual system is an unique, abstract, singular entity. The textual system is distinct from its own text and it is distinct from other textual systems. The text is the material real of the textual system, that which permits the assertion of the textual system as “the singular textual system.”

The opposition “text”/“textual system” contrasts a difference which informs nearly the entirety of *Language and Cinema*. Indeed, that writing can be organized in terms of oppositions of the kind “attested process”/“constructed intelligibility.”⁽⁹⁾ “Film”/“cinema,” the rounding paired opposition of *Language and Cinema* marks the distinction between actual films, what we see when we go to “the cinema,” and the system derived by analysis from that actuality.⁽¹⁰⁾ That system is designated elsewhere as “the cinematic language system,” which is formally rather similar to the textual system, but writ large. And, as for the textual system, named as “singular textual system,” Metz takes considerable pains to delimit the specificity of the cinematic language system, i.e., its singularity, from other language systems, and above all from language itself. Just as he seeks to establish the specificity of the textual system, so he seeks to establish the specificity of the cinematic language system. Both the textual system and the cinematic language system are abstractions of a process into a system. In establishing specificity, Metz reconverts the textual systems into a process from which he then further abstracts the cinematic language system.

The paired oppositions Metz operates are not only similar in what they oppose, but logically connected. They call to one another in a circle of overall systematicity. The cinematic language system is not derived from texts, but from textual systems, the result of a prior analytic operation. At the same time, the textual systems can only be fully comprehended if the elements of the cinematic language system (codes and subcodes), which it organizes, are known and identified. On the one hand, the textual system, in its very uniqueness, establishes many of the codes of the cinematic language system. On the other hand, it manipulates the codes of the cinematic language system as in part established by other unique textual systems.

Certain important implications derive from this grid of structured oppositions. The end term of one pair becomes the first term of another. If “text” stands as attested process in relation to the constructed intelligibility of “textual system,” the second term stands as attested process in relation to “cinematic language system.” Stated differently, the opposition is one of “heterogeneity/homogeneity.” At each move towards a larger compass, towards the notion of “the cinematic language system,” greater homogeneity is evident between ever greater units. In effect, there is an increase in system.

From this point of view “attested process”—at whatever level it is conceived—poses itself as a threat to “constructed intelligibility,” in other words as a threat to system. System is ever poised to absorb the vagaries, the heterogeneity, the free play in process, to generalize and

connect up elements, in short, to systematize, to encompass the free movement of a signifying practice (the film) into the rigidity of the sign (meaning), or, more precisely, the place of the sign within a structured totality (the cinematic language system).

What is meant by this notion of system? It appears to mean nothing other than the dominant established codes of the culture. What is systematic is in effect what has been established, what is conventional and therefore what is communicable. The systematic is what is replete with meaning, what is confirmed by social practices and serves those social practices.

It appears that Metz' project is a project of repressing that which is not yet sign, which is presignifying, which is a work and an activity and might be termed "signifying practice," into an ordered system of signs. (11) The text, or rather certain texts, are a danger to system and threaten it, particularly if they move against the dominant codes, refuse any attempt to be absorbed, in short, refuse the attempt to be dominated. (12) The sign of domination is system itself, yet to establish systems is the central concern of Metz (and of traditional semiotics), and that establishment is always directed against the work of signifying, the work of the text, in the name of the structured sign, in the name of a full social meaning.

Metz' writings throughout employ models of analysis and of structure derived from structural linguistics. At the same time, Metz was forced to point to the difference between linguistic phenomena and aesthetic ones. A task of his cinesemiotics became the definition of differences between language and cinema ("cinematic specificity") and yet those definitions depended on linguistic notions ("the cinematic language system"). This possible contradiction, or at the very least, this problem, seemed to have been overcome by shifting the relative weight contained in the opposition in linguistics between "language"/"speech." For the most part, linguists are concerned with the first term of the opposition, and not the second, with the structure of language, rather than the individual "real" utterances of the language. Metz gives greater weight to the "speech" of cinema, to actual films, as the site of the construction of codes which then become part of the cinematic language system, to be used in other texts, now as a fully coded element. The "all at once" character of language—it must have appeared completely formed, otherwise communication would not have been possible—contrasts with the development (evolution?) of the cinematic language system. This would apply to all areas of the cinema, most obviously the syntax of cinematic punctuation, or serious subcodes of lighting, or spatial dispositions.

An analogy from literature might help to further clarify this problematic with which Metz deals and which derives from his close relation to linguistic models. The denotative level of literature is language. Literature is expressed through language, yet it subverts and transgresses language, defines itself as other than language by its use of

the fully-fledged signs of the linguistic system as only first term signifiers of another system—its own as text and the larger one of Literature.⁽¹³⁾ Literary texts are in excess over the language, supplement, “over-determine” the linguistic sign. Like the other arts, Literature is connotative.

All literary texts perform this work, but some go beyond it in a subversion of Literature itself. If Literature is not a language, it nevertheless, like Cinema, has laws, conventions, rules. These are Literature. To refuse these rules, to negate them, is to refuse the domination of the dominant codes (Literature). It is to literally produce a writing that which is not yet read. To produce within the codes of Literature is virtually to produce a product which has already been read. i.e. conforms to the dominant codes, and is therefore fully developed sign. A writing on the other hand is pre-sign, pre-system. not-yet Literature, a practice and production of signifying (which has not yet been read, not yet systematized) and which by that very fact contests the dominant Literary and other codes of the culture.

It should be clear, at least minimally, that the prime thrust of Metz’ semiotics is on the side of the codes, the system, in effect on the side of the established, the ideologically dominant. His project is to delimit Cinema, codes of the social practice and not the presignifying work which might contest these. On the contrary, it is precisely such work and activity that Metz himself appears to contest,

It might be helpful at this point to return to Metz’ opposition “text/textual system,” in particular the way he specifies the textual system and its workings. It is only a mention in his writing and can be quoted in full:

“.. a singular system is a combination of several codes ... Saying that a filmic system is a combination of several codes implies that it consists essentially in a *displacement* ... no code plays a central role in the overall structure of a given text, not even those ‘mobilized’ by the text. What makes the system of a film is *passage* from one code to another; each film takes shape *with* various codes, and it is in this ‘with’ that the importance lies.”

“With diverse codes, but also *against* them. In this sense, each film is built upon the destruction of its own codes. It is not enough to prove that in a filmic system each code is inessential because it is only the combination of codes that is essential ... the proper task of the filmic system is to actively underplay each of these codes by asserting its own particular logic and *because* it asserts it, an assertion which is necessarily accomplished through the negation of that which is not itself i.e. codes ... In each filmic system the ... codes are both present and absent: present because the system is built *upon* them (on the basis of them, with/against them), absent because the system is only a system to the extent that it is

something other than the message of a code (or a series of these messages), i.e., because it begins to exist only when (and where) these codes begin to cease to exist in the form of codes, because it is this very moment of negation, destruction construction.”

.”.. the *movement of the code* seems to us to retain all of its importance, not only because the study of codes, outside of any filmic system, is, for semiotic research, an end in itself (although not the only one), but because filmic systems themselves, as active processes of displacement, are only intelligible if one has a sure idea of what it is that has been displaced.”(14)

The deployment of the notion of codes in this statement marks an important advance in Metz’ cinesemiotics. In particular it is an advance over positions taken in *Film Language* where the only code identified in the cinema was a code of narrative connectives—the grand syntagmatic. That code was given a privileged place as the defining characteristic code of cinema, the most pertinent, most homogeneous, most ordered, most dominant. It limited Metz’ semiotics to a narrow linguistic model and by highlighting narrative committed his semiotics to an extreme realistic defense of the cinema. The essence of cinema, its pertinent feature, was made to rest in a strict logical-temporal order. If there was a cinematic language system that system was, above all else, a system of narrative.(15)

Here in *Language and Cinema* the text is conceived as pluricodic, no single code being dominant. The grand syntagmatic becomes one of a multiplicity of codes while more general codes of narrative are not even given the status of being specifically “cinematic” since shared by other artistic systems, particularly literary ones. Metz’ notion of codes creates a flexibility in the concept of a cinematic language system and introduces quite new relations between that system and the system of texts.

Despite this advance Metz’ cinesemiotics still seems locked into realist assumptions, most notably at the precise point at which he discusses the pluricodic structure of the film text. A plurality of codes is a permanent given of all artistic texts and it was proper for Metz to have stressed this in relation to the cinema. However, all texts are not plural texts. Some, as Barthes has pointed out, have only a meager plural, are parsimoniously plural, as in the case with the classic realist text.(16)

The parsimoniously plural represses the pluricodicity of the text by establishing a hierarchy of codes, a systematized domination of one set of codes over others. For example, in the classic realist text narrative codes dominate codes of the symbolic, or the cultural, and it is these narrative codes which bestow sense, direction and meaning to the text. That Metz established narrative codes in *Film Language* to the exclusion of others in the cinema in part pointed to the *de facto* dominance of narrative in most films. Films, as it were, repressed, kept

hidden their pluricodicity through the dominance of narrative. That was the only code which Metz in the first instance could disentangle because it was the only code which immediately presented itself to view, taking the stage and blocking out others.

A double ideological pressure seemed to have operated. The face of realism presented a single view, while Metz already predisposed to that view, already ideologically committed to a classic realism, could not see behind it. A glance was sufficient.

The repression of other codes by dominant codes arrests the activity and free play of these codes by literally assigning them a “place” in a system in which the dominant codes are central, are dominant. In that sense the dominant codes “read” the text, “read” the other codes, establish a place of knowledge and sense, define entrances and exits from which the text may be approached and understood.

The parsimoniously plural of classic realism is a text already played out *before* play begins. It is that fact which makes clear the notion that such texts are “already read.” Not only do they set a reading, but set a reading in accord with the dominant codes of the ideology, fixed in Literature, or Cinema, or Painting. That ideology, under which we already live, is simply restated, recycled and confirmed. It is an *already-known*, an already-read.

What is the function of the codic domination of classic realism? It functions not only to close off other codes, arrest their play and their differences, but to establish the unique singularity of the text.

That the text is already singular as a material object naturalizes a process accomplished by the textual system. The textual system actually “ends” in the classic text by appearing to resolve the suspensions, contradictions, differences, enigmas, puzzles which the text has set in motion. It is like a sentence fully predicated, finished, finalized. The fullness of sense and meaning is a function of the closure of the textual codes, the final denial of their plurality.

The multiple voices (codes) in the texts end in a superior voice, a singular voice which finally silences all other voices.⁽¹⁷⁾ That voice is no less than the voice of the subject-author fully constituted by the singular unique textual system. In that sense the dominant code “speaks” as the code of unique individual expression and creativity. The text literally constructs a transcendental subject as the source of the text. To whom does it speak? It speaks to me, the reader-subject. It establishes a social exchange, a communication of meaning between subjects, author and reader, or more precisely, producer and consumer. The text has become complete, replete, in short, a product. The textual system becomes the expression of the author. The unique expression of the author is the unique textual system.

The coincidence of the ending of the material text with the finalization of the textual system makes the latter appear as self-evident and natural,

in fact, as “real.” “The end” is truly the end. All is fixed, glued together, with the glue of system, logic, connectives and subject.

When Meta refers to the “singular textual system” the reference is to an ordered systematicity and wholeness of the text, what marks it off, constitutes it. It is not difficult to see why, in the circumstances, his writing so insists on the real materiality of the text. It is that materiality which helps to license the notion of the singularity of the textual system—doubly singular because it is uniquely systematic and because it is real, actualized.

It is here that Metz’ cinesemiotics comes close to the organicism of traditional criticism and to its realist assumptions. What possibly could establish the singularity of the text outside of an unique creative subject-author for which the text is the expression and the sign? What else could bestow that quality of singularity, but a hierarchy of codes which fully establishes the totality of the text, its integrity and its meaning?

It is in Metz’ notion of codes that assumptions of classic realism and the criticism which supports it are challenged. It is where he “fixes” that notion, effaces the play of codes and their play of differences in a presumed overwrought systematicity that he resumes the assumptions which elsewhere his writings contradict.

The gap between a critical semiotics of the cinema and traditional but serious analyses of the cinema will never be closed, or never established as an area of real struggle between conflicting ideologies, unless that semiotics self-critically substitutes its obsession with system, and hence its commitment to the dominant codes of social practice and social cohesion, by a practice which concentrates on the activity of signifying, the work of the text, an area which is pre-signifying and which challenges the dominance of the sign, dominance *tout court*.

That work can only succeed by a greater attention to texts. To say, as some do, and Metz among them, that such work cannot yet proceed before codes are fully enumerated appears to be the most abstract of empiricisms. It is not a list of signs and systems that is required but rather a study of the practice of signifying, a practice only carried out by texts against systems and against the sign.

The tools are available for such analyses and semiotics has provided them. What blocks its operation is not “not enough facts” or not enough method but too much ideology which pervades a narrow semiotics as it does a wider criticism.

The obsession of traditional semiotics with the sign, with system, with center, with the expressing subject must be critically examined and exposed. That is a work of theory by semiotics on semiotics, a theorizing on the work of the text, a work of signifying, and one which parallels that textual operation in its investigation of the sign, revealing its gaps, absences, fissures, and repressions. The work in fact which *pre-cedes* the sign and its placing within established dominant discourses.

Robin Wood in his demand for greater attentiveness to the actual film text, however correct, could not have been aware, nor could have suspected the full implications of that demand, in particular for his own critical project.

“The end,” the “pay-off,” the closure of theorizing is not the text as coherent product. Theory is not a “ready-made,” a suitably tailored commodity, a thing to be applied where most profitable. It is instead a production, a signifying practice. And the specific object of that practice, the practice of a critical semiotics, is the signifying work of the text, not its system, its wholeness, its totality, but its production, its generation. Critical semiotics entails a perpetual work on the work of signifying, its own and that of the text.

The cinesemiotics of Christian Metz marks a crucial beginning for a critical semiotics of the cinema. The gaps, the contradictions in his writings point to the necessity for a genuine return to the text, not as site of finalization, as ultimate goal, but as opening, initiation, commencement into an infinitude of difference, play and pleasure.⁽¹⁸⁾

Notes

^{1.} Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York, 1974). p. 3.

^{2.} See *Screen* 14:1/2 and in particular the two articles by Stephen Heath, “Film/Cinetext/Text” and “Metz’s Semiology: A Short Glossary.” And also by Heath, “The Work of Christian Metz” in *Screen* 14:3.

^{3.} Christian Metz, *Film Language* (New York, 1974) and *Language and Cinema* (The Hague, 1974).

^{4.} For an example of the former see Noel Carroll’s review of Metz’ writings in *Film Comment* 10:6, and for the latter Paul Sandro’s account of Metz in *Diacritics*, Fall, 1974.

^{5.} See in particular Julia Kristeva. “The Semiotic Activity,” *Screen* 11:1/2 and her “The System and the Speaking Subject,” in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1973. Also Jacques Derrida, “Structure: Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in R. Macksey and E. Donato, *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore, 1970).

^{6.} This is done in particular by the “academic” approach to Metz taken in *Diacritics* while it makes of Metz’ cinesemiotics yet another academic formalism.

^{7.} See the glossary by Heath mentioned above. The entire glossary is structured in terms of paired, related sets of oppositions.

^{8.} Note, *Language and Cinema*, p. 73.

^{9.} See Heath’s glossary.

[10.](#) Ibid.

[11.](#) Kristeva, op cit.

[12.](#) For Metz, Godard simply elaborates and enriches the narrative core of cinema rather than effecting a subversion of that core, it's the same again, but better, "richer."

[13.](#) This concept is detailed in Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, (tr. NY, 1967) and *Mythologies* (tr. NY, 1972).

[14.](#) Metz, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

[15.](#) See in particular Michel Cegarra, "Cinema and Semiology." in *Screen* 14:1/2.

[16.](#) Barthes, op. cit., p. 6.

[17.](#) We could say that in the *Cahiers du cinéma's* analysis of Ford's YOUNG MR. LINCOLN, the *Cahiers* critics refuse to allow the dominant codes to "do their own thing" by going beyond them to pick up other codes which go against the grain (*Screen* 13:3 Autumn 72).

Charles Eckert's "The Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's MARKED WOMAN" (*Film Quarterly* 17:2, Winter 73-74) elaborates the concept of overdetermination in film.

[18.](#) I am grateful to Ben Brewster for having read this article and for his comments and criticism. I reproduce much of that criticism below. The points I think are correct and important, and I offer them to the reader as a critique of some of the positions expressed in my article or rather as a pointing to some of the dangers which such positions could give rise to:

. " .. there are dangers in making anti-organicness, anti-systematicity a critical value in itself, dangers of a kind of Croceanism, the true work of art evading the fixation of any system and thus attaining a pure, uncoded expressivity. It's important to specify the way current notions of organicness, systematicity help unify and thus underpin the currently dominant ideologies and thus to be able to give strategic priorities to any deconstruction project. Metz's current interest in psychoanalysis, the first major statement of which should appear in the next issue of *Communications* which is on psychoanalysis and the cinema, stems from this problem I think (or rather, as his interest in radical conceptions of art is a bit modish and derivative, I suspect, from the problem of a unification of the textual system based on something less nebulous than the cinematic language or cinematic specificity). Moreover, such a generalized notion of deconstruction is vulnerable on the grounds Paul Willemen raised that the reader is always capable of reading any text

offered to him as a system because of its material closure—he construes each gap as an ellipsis, each deviation from a code as a metabole, and so on. For deconstruction to have a political effect, there must be structures that resist this process of ad hoc redefinition of the conventions, which is what I take Kristeva to be getting at in her theory of psychic *Bahnungen* and social pressures that constrain the processes of signification from outside—once again, Freud being introduced to handle the aporiae of semiotics. “

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Responses to *The Pedestrian*— Walking to the sounds of different drummers

by Evan Pattak

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It has been nearly fifty years since I. A. Richards performed his ingenious experiment with his students at Cambridge. Concerned that poetry was not being read the way it was meant to be, Richards gave his students thirteen poems to analyze and interpret. The poems were fairly obscure to begin with, but just to be sure, Richards withheld the titles and authors.

He collected the results in his famous *Practical Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929), in which he explained his “use of psychology to study mental processes of poetry readers.” What he determined was that the students had all sorts of preconceptions that colored their interpretations of the poetry. Some of these he called stock responses, sentimentality, inhibition, doctrinal adhesions, technical suppositions and mnemonic irrelevances, bits of personal history that flavor interpretation.

Richards’ study is still widely cited today. Does it have applicability to film? I became interested in that question quite by accident, following a recent televised showing of *CITIZEN KANE* in Pittsburgh. Following the movie, an all-night call-in show host received a cry of distress from a near-frantic woman. She had just seen *CITIZEN KANE* and still couldn't figure out what Rosebud was.

Having seen the film three or four times, the host assured the woman that Rosebud was Kane’s mistress. Five minutes later an indignant caller insisted that Rosebud was not Kane’s mistress. Rosebud was his illegitimate child.

Neither, of course, is correct. Rosebud, in Orson Welles’ 1941 movie, is Kane’s mysterious dying word. A film company researcher is assigned to ferret out the meaning of Rosebud by interviewing those who knew

Kane. By this thread he weaves the story of a powerful newspaper baron ruined by his insatiable appetite for love. The researcher never does find his answer. But we viewers, in the final frame, discover that Rosebud was Kane's sled, symbolic of the boyhood and affection wrenched from him when his nouveau riche mother signed him over to a bank.

Perhaps it was mere quirk that someone who had just seen the film couldn't tell what Rosebud was and that two others familiar with the movie also missed the climax entirely. But was there something deeper there? On a hunch, I began polling people, eventually reaching ninety-four of them, asking if they had seen KANE, and if they had, did they remember who or what Rosebud was.

Fifty had not seen the film. Ten couldn't remember if they had seen it or not, and seven saw only parts of it. Of the twenty-seven who definitely saw the entire movie, eleven knew that Rosebud was Kane's sled. Two said Rosebud was Kane's servant One said it was his house. Others thought it was his dog, his wife, a person he had murdered, a clandestine contact. One respondent offered an eloquent, touching interpretation of Rosebud as a philosophy, an aura that suffused the film. In more material terms, he said, Rosebud was a chair. The others had no idea what Rosebud was. Two in this group, however, exhibited remarkable memories in describing in toto an episode of the old *Dick Van Dyke Show* in which Van Dyke explained to his son why the boy had been given the middle name Rosebud.

Though the results are interesting and revealing, the informal survey in no way approximated Richard's work. In the first place, my question dealt only with a matter of plot, whether people noticed and remembered a particular, albeit critical, occurrence of the film. Richards was concerned with more than just the sense of the poems, although a good number of students were helpless on that score. His study covered a broad range: poetic devices, symbols and above all, readers' mental processes. Moreover, it was possible that some respondents hadn't seen KANE for thirty years; comparison of their remarks with those of people who had seen the film that week would have been meaningless. Finally, despite the genius of CITIZEN KANE, Rosebud-as-sled was a puny, rather forgettable symbol. (In the bickering that today surrounds KANE, one of the fiercest disputes involves who deserves more credit for the film, Welles or scenario writer Herman J. Mankiewicz. Significantly, in a 1965 interview Welles pinned Mankiewicz with responsibility for Rosebud.)

To determine if Richards' findings hold for film, I thought it would be best to stand outside a theater, tape recorder in hand, and give people free reign to discuss a movie. The film would still be fresh in their minds, and by allowing them to ramble where they would, I hoped to penetrate their thought processes.

The results do indeed suggest that how filmgoers perceive and receive a movie may have more to do with their preconceptions and states of mind than with the film's presentation. Different people tended to understand

the film in different and sometimes contradictory ways. Memories, as with *Rosebud*, were selective and quirky. Respondents often demonstrated pinpoint recall and lively interest where scenes or characters echoed incidents in their own lives; where such connection was lacking, they were frequently uninterested, fuzzy on detail. Several viewers, for example, said they were drawn to the film by a certain actor's appearance. When the actor turned out to have a small role, they spent most of the time watching for him and, as a consequence, seemed confused about the film as a whole.

Equally significant, many respondents' opinions and perceptions depended, for better or worse, on how well the film entertained them. Here the present study departs from Richards. No one picking up a poem would be oblivious to imagery, metaphor, symbol and tone. Indeed, one usually digs through these to the poet's meaning. In the film study, however, respondents seemed not especially interested in film language—flashbacks, interior monologues, cutting—or what the filmmaker, through the arrangement of such devices, hoped to convey. Questions about the point of the film tended to elicit blank stares and stuttered replies, as if the respondents had never thought a film might have a point, or several. The film, perhaps film itself, was seen only as a flow of events, a story. In this sense, the respondents as film viewers were essentially passive.

THE MOVIE

The film I chose for the experiment was Maximilian Schell's *THE PEDESTRIAN*. As the movie opens, we meet the protagonist, Giese, a solid, attractive West German industrialist, the head of an engineering firm. He is wealthy and respected. But all is not as it appears. A newspaper is investigating Giese for possible complicity in a Nazi extermination of a Greek village some thirty years before. And there's more. Giese's son Andreas was killed when a car driven by his father crashed into a parked vehicle.

Scenes with his grandson, mistress and dog show Giese to be a warm, sensitive man. These humanizing touches, however, are cut by two series of progressive flashbacks. In the first series, it is revealed that Giese almost certainly was involved in the massacre in some way, though the exact nature of that involvement—whether as commander, child shooter or conveyor of orders—is never made clear. The second series of flashbacks shows that Andreas learned of his father's involvement in the massacre and was ashamed and angry. During the fatal car ride, Andreas and his father quarreled. Andreas grabbed the wheel, causing the car to swerve and crash.

The newspaper prints its exposé. There is scandal, including a demonstration outside Giese's plant. The film's climactic scene is a television debate between an official of the newspaper and Giese's attorney. Giese is neither exculpated nor condemned. The telling statement is that of the moderator: there may not be collective guilt, but there should be collective shame.

In *THE PEDESTRIAN*, Schell seems chiefly concerned with guilt and responsibility. But his is no narrow indictment. With allusions to Vietnam and William Calley, Schell appears to be using his film as a warning that what happened in Germany can and will happen wherever people drop their guard.

I chose *THE PEDESTRIAN* because it is a complex film without being unduly esoteric. There are subtle touches, but if the film is a puzzle, by the final frame every piece is squarely in place. The movie won the Golden Globe Award in Hollywood for Best Foreign Picture of 1974 and was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category.

THE SAMPLE

I conducted interviews on four consecutive days in July 1974 outside the Manor Theatre in Pittsburgh. It was the movie's first, and to this date, only run in Pittsburgh. I began the interviews on a Saturday, so that the talks were split between the weekend and weekdays.

I selected people randomly as they walked from the theater. I briefly described my purpose. Then, if they were willing, I asked them to summarize the film, tell me what the point of it was, and what about it they liked or disliked. If in their summaries they didn't mention what Giese had done in the war, I asked them about that. Finally, I asked what happened to Andreas, assuming this also was not previously covered.

For the most part, I was content to let respondents speak as long as they liked on whatever topics they chose. Only in the instance of Andreas and the car mishap did I feel obliged to direct them. Technically, it was correct to say that Andreas died in an auto accident and leave it at that. But I was afraid that people who answered in that way might have realized that it was Andreas' hand on the wheel but, for whatever reasons, weren't saying it. When I got that answer, I asked in as flat a voice as possible if the respondent could describe the accident.

In all, fourteen women and seventeen men were interviewed. Although I was primarily interested in reaching people before the crowd filed by, every age group, beginning with the teens, seemed to be equally represented. Two persons interviewed had seen the film twice.

THE RESULTS

The Manor Theatre is in Squirrel Hill, a section, predominantly Jewish, of middle and upper income residents. The Manor is primarily a neighborhood, second-run theater. In fact, *THE PEDESTRIAN* was one of only several first-run films to play there in recent years. (*AMARCORD* was another.) But like the other three movie houses in Squirrel Hill, the Manor is eager to present films of Jewish interest. Movies thought too parochial for the downtown houses, such as the French *THE MAD ADVENTURES OF RABBI JACOB* and the Israeli *ROSA*, have played in

Squirrel Hill. That there are four theaters in the area speaks well of the interest in film in Squirrel Hill.

Thus, it was perhaps to be expected that a film dealing at least in part with Nazism would evoke vehement responses. Schell takes great pains to avoid the trap of easy, banal anti-Nazism. He loads the film with references to other wars and exterminations, a number of times citing the My Lai massacre. He makes rather blatant use of the famous photo of the little girl stumbling naked and dazed from a Vietnam holocaust. Only a few respondents commented on the adumbrations of Vietnam. More typical were responses such as these:

“The movie is fantastic. It’s about wanting to forget. The Germans want to forget. I believe that sincerely. They want to forget, but I don’t see how they can. They definitely are guilty. Even today they’re trying to make parks out of Auschwitz and all the concentration camps. They’re trying to get a park-like atmosphere there. I wonder if you knew that. Oh yes. They definitely want to forget. You better believe it.”—Nina Z.

“The end of the picture is, the German people are living, how shall I put it, a normal life. Most of the German people are happy they’re living. They feel no guilt about the whole thing ... They show it by many episodes, where people are in their homes, they’re having all sorts of parties, they’re enjoying life, they’re having a good time. Industry is growing. Industry is big.”—Marty P.

Marty P.’s observation notwithstanding, there is only one “party” depicted in the movie, a dinner where Giese’s involvement in the massacre is, for the first time, publicly discussed. It is a sordid affair.

Those were the most extreme, but by no means the only, examples of respondents appearing to view this film in terms of prior conceptions. THE PEDESTRIAN offered a fair number of hooks—Nazism, war, war crimes—on which to hang generalities, “stock responses” in Richards’ terminology, and several respondents took such an opportunity.

“I think it was interesting. It takes you back to the history of world war, of the Nazis.”—John S.

“It was a marvelous movie. It was very well done. The actors were terrific. It was about the period of Nazism in Germany ... They had the building up of Germany and the industrialists getting back into the corporations.”—Shirley S.

“I think [it’s about] the whole issue of whether people have the right to commit crimes like this and whether years later we have a right to try them for it”—Terry F.

“It was about the immorality of war, the aggression of one

human being towards the next.”—Michael L.

Other respondents found their perceptions of the film influenced by their moods or frames of mind at the time of viewing.

“It was very strange for me ... I had just finished a book about the war and atrocities, and I guess at that point I was just sick of the subject. You know what I mean? I was tired at that point of Nazis and the war.”—Sharon G.

THE PEDESTRIAN reminded several respondents of another film—the same film, coincidentally—and they viewed the Schell movie in terms of the comparison.

“They had a lot of flashback scenes, through the eyes of different people, It was like the same thing, except, actually, have you seen CITIZEN KANE? It was like, the only thing I can compare it to is the opera scene from CITIZEN KANE.”—Edward S.

“I think one point is to show the means by which journalists will investigate and why they will investigate such an act. In addition I think it shows the clay feet of someone at the top, as did CITIZEN KANE.”—Steve K.

Finally, the legacy of Watergate seemed evident in the responses. Two viewers, including the one quoted above, felt the movie was meant as a look at how a newspaper pursues an investigative story. Two others interpreted the television debate at the film’s close as a courtroom hearing on a request for a temporary injunction.

In his study, Richards found preconceptions about form—“technical supposition”—in the analyses of students who, say, automatically panned sonnets or verse without rhyme and therefore had little interest in interpreting such works. In much the same way, many respondents in the present study had strong prior notions of what a film should be and of what type of movie they would enjoy. THE PEDESTRIAN, with its less-than-linear structure, did not fulfill those expectations, and interest and awareness diminished accordingly.

“I feel sorry for the people who were killed, but I don't think the point of making a movie should be just flashback, back and forth, back and forth. There were a lot of scenes you had to think what they were about, but they were boring. I look at the producer’s name, and the next time it’s produced by whatever the man’s name is, I’m not going to go.”—Dan T.

“This isn't my type of an enjoyable film. I would rather go see a musical, or something that has more of a plot. This didn't have much of a plot.”—Nancy R.

The importance here is that respondents who found the film unsuited to

their ideas of entertainment, though they could accurately reconstruct the storyline, did not usually attempt to discern broader implications. To cite specific instances: although Giese's role in the massacre is ambiguous, the ambiguity is clearly presented. Of twenty-five respondents who addressed themselves to the question, "What had Giese done during the war?" eighteen noted that he had been accused but that the allegations had not been proven.

The car accident in which Andreas was killed, on the other hand, is much more subtly shown. Giese at one point confides to his daughter-in-law that he thinks Andreas meant to kill him. To the question, "What happened to Giese's son Andreas?" twenty of twenty-nine respondents noted that it was Andreas' hand that swerved the wheel. All in this group accepted at face value Giese's statement that his son meant to kill him. The critics, however, almost uniformly interpreted the act as an apparent attempt by Andreas to kill his father and *himself*. To arrive at that conclusion, one had to consider not only Andreas and his few lines of dialogue. One also had to weigh, and eventually discount, what Giese himself says. This was a sophisticated step, and no respondent took it.

CONCLUSIONS

Obviously, great care must be taken in drawing conclusions from this study, if only because of the smallness of the sample. There are other problems. Richards' students had the opportunity to rethink and revise their interpretations with the poems before them. The present study's format, in which respondents had to answer orally and at once, did not permit leisurely reflection or organization of thought. Under the circumstances, it would have been surprising had the responses been well-ordered and less visceral. In addition, the interview structure does not guarantee comprehensive replies. A direct answer may be but the tip of the iceberg, the complete thought process massed unuttered beneath the surface. Richards' students submitted their analyses in writing, itself so instrumental in shaping thought. The differences between the written and oral modes may be so profound as to frustrate meaningful comparison. Perhaps a study of this type would work best in a classroom, or classroom-style situation.

It might also be pointed out that Richards' sample was composed of young people probably paying a great deal of money to study, among other things, poetry. My sample was randomly selected from a more amorphous, certainly less definable group. Viewers seeing the film in first-run or art houses or in neighborhoods of a different ethnic or economic character might have had different interpretations. This, of course, is a major conclusion of the study, that there is a virtually limitless range of personal and psychological factors that flavor perception and understanding of film. What ultimately can be said of a film viewed, in consecutive showings, in these two ways?

"I thought the point was to show that people had lives that went on, and that they continued, and that they were people, and that even though they had past experiences, they tended

to forget them if they were unpleasant and leave them behind.”—Barry M.

“It’s about an ex-German officer who is constantly reliving the guilt of his past—the war crimes, the war’s atrocities that he is taking personal blame for and punishing himself for and cannot allow himself to be absolved for ... it shows what guilt can do to a person, how it’s one of the most horrible things anybody can suffer.”—Sandy P.

Perhaps it is tautological to conclude that people expect mostly entertainment from film and that serious film will be all things to all people, depending on their moods, company, background and suppositions. Yet, given film’s enormous importance as a means of communication and expression, it should be of service to any filmmaker to know that, whatever his/her intent, his/her work will be interpreted, as Richards put it, on the basis of “politics or spleen or some other social motive.”

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Film as a Subversive Art Self-subversion

by Chuck Kleinhans

from *Jump Cut*, no. 7, 1975, p. 27

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Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art* (New York: Random House, 1975) 327 pp. & biblio., index, illus. \$15.00.

A few years ago when leaving Paris, I shared some train space with a young Canadian couple who were celebrating the success of their business, a karate and judo school, with a vacation in France. In a matter of days they had seen the tourist's Paris that I'd avoided for two months. It was fascinating to hear of all the things I'd missed (especially their standard diet of steak, lobster, and roast beef). The high point of the trip had come the night before: a tour of 5 or 7 or 9 nightclubs. They recounted it in great detail with the innocent enthusiasm unique to children and to North Americans in Europe, even the production of a nude "Camelot" at the Lido which ended the tour. ("Even the sword fights were nude?" my companion asked them.) The tour had started at a third-rate place, which turned out to have the most shocking show: it included an act of lesbian lovemaking. "Some of the people with us were really grossed out," they explained, "but it was really done in very good taste."

I start with this story because, pun aside, it presents the basic predicament of Amos Vogel's *Film as a Subversive Art*. Can form subvert content, can content subvert form, can either or both subvert the audience, how, when, why, for whom, and does it really matter? Vogel is convinced that it does matter, and I'm inclined to agree with him, which is why I wanted to review the book. But after reading it, I'm not sure that he's got a handle on the question at all.

Form subverting content is as old as parody and irony, which is to say it's a very ancient business. And the question of content subverting the audience has been on the aesthetic agenda since Plato endorsed state censorship in the *Republic*. More recently, and in the world of film, various British film critics have tried to argue a case for Douglas Sirk (*MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION*, *WRITTEN ON THE WIND*, *IMITATION*

OF LIFE, etc.) on the grounds that his stylized form subverts his sugary sentimentalism, though strict auteurists seem to be the only Americans who can swallow that idea. And, of course, the form/ content/ subversion question animates a great deal of discussion of militant political film and the avant-garde. So, the questions at the heart of Vogel's book are really very important ones, and are basic to the liveliest issues being debated today in film criticism. Questions we face go from "What is a positive image of women in Hollywood film?" and "What is Michael Snow trying to do with film?" to "What is a revolutionary political cinema?"

What Vogel delivers to this ongoing discussion is a magnificently illustrated, extremely comprehensive survey glued together with a tissue of contradictory analysis. We have subversion of form: the Soviet 1920s, expressionism, surrealism, dada, pop, (mostly silent) comedy, and a heavy dose of the international avant-garde. Then we have the subversion of content: Godard, Third World, Eastern Europe, and Nazi cinema. On to forbidden subjects: sex, birth, death, religion. And a final mushy celebration of the counterculture and "the eternal subversion":

"In the last analysis, every work of art, to the extent that it is original and breaks with the past instead of repeating it, is subversive."

So what else is new?

Vogel has a very wide acquaintance with films, both orthodox and experimental, and a lively interest in the new and unusual. Politically his heart is in the right place (he comes out and says Hiroshima and Vietnam are cases of genocide). But it's never clear exactly what he means by "subversive" except that it helped him string together a book on films he obviously liked. It is clear he has an endless capacity for swallowing things at more than face value (e.g., an actress walking upside down in 2001's gravityless spaceship "opens us to a sense of cosmic consciousness"), and idealism (e.g., the "eternal tension between organized society and creative artist"). And at this late date he still refers to women as girls and can't seem to connect the depiction of women as objects and victims with female oppression except on the rarified (and therefore basically irrelevant) level of taboo.

It's hard to tell what motivated this book, especially because Vogel's analysis itself is such an intellectually mixed bag. In the same paragraph he mentions the decline of capitalist civilization (Marx) and the collective unconscious of the race (Jung). Vogel has a subject matter, but no consistent thesis, and he never comes to terms with the contradictions of jumbling different thinkers. But whatever the book's intention, it must be considered in its effect (though with an evasive apology Vogel tries to confuse the issue by offering, "this book is an approximation of a draft of a first edition"—a statement worthy of Ron Ziegler). At last glance, precisely because the analysis is so thin, it's another coffee table film book. With its Random House imprint, well-executed design, and lots of stills, it's just a high class version of a sleazo

porn publication, “The Making of DEEP THROAT” or “Modern Marriage Techniques Illustrated,” with a veneer of commentary to dress up the action. Basically this is your 1975 version of the Hollis Alpert-Arthur Knight *Playboy* series, “Sex in the Cinema.”

Maybe Vogel’s apology means something. Maybe he had to pay off a gambling debt or something in a hurry and churned out a potboiler ... or maybe he was just getting the money to do the book he could do. But we don't need apologies, what we need is the solid piece of intellectual work he’s capable of. As the book stands now, it simply subverts itself: it’s slick, but trash nonetheless.

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The Last Word: Peace in Vietnam

(from *Jump Cut*, no. 7, 1975, p. 27)

The Wheel of Law

by Ho Chi Minh

The wheel of the law turns
without pause.

After the rain, good weather.
In the wink of an eye

the universe throws off
its muddy clothes.

For ten thousand miles
the land

spreads out like a beautiful brocade.
Light breezes. Smiling flowers.

High in the trees, among
the sparkling leaves

all the birds sing at once.
People and animals rise-up reborn.

What could be more natural?
After sorrow, comes joy.

The last word

Theory/criticism/reviewing/practice

by the Editors

from *Jump Cut*, no. 7, 1975, pp. 27-28

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In our second editorial we quoted Eisenstein:

“American capitalism finds its sharpest and most expressive reflection in the American cinema.”

We then argued for a critical discussion of Hollywood films as part of our examination of all contemporary cinema. Now, after a year of writing, reading, editing, and discussing film reviews, with Eisenstein’s words in mind we would like to extend our argument for printing reviews in JUMP CUT. While we have fallen short of demonstrating the unity of theory, criticism, reviewing, and political practice, we still see it as our goal.

Strong traditions of pragmatism and empiricism in the United States have hindered the development of critical theory in the human sciences. In the area of film and media studies, these factors have been intensified by the fiercely maintained but nevertheless artificial isolation into nearly feudal craft guilds of those people concerned with different aspects of the media. While the strong anti-intellectualism in much film discussion can be seen as a healthy reaction against academic elitism, it is primarily reactionary, especially when voiced by leftists, because there is no such thing as “doing without theory.” Every human activity is based on some theory, and to refuse to recognize it is to refuse to face up to the values and implications of one’s own theory.

At the same time, we must grant that the prevailing tendencies of film theory in the United States offer little or nothing. The nascent U.S. effort to develop left cultural theory in the 1930s was cut off by WW2 and the postwar repression of the left. In the 1960s, primarily in Europe and in the third world—particularly in Latin America (Solanas, Getino, Rocha, Sanjinés, the Cubans)—new efforts to develop a Marxist theory of film were begun. As part of our development of a political film criticism in the United States, we must go back to the lost U.S. heritage, to other

prewar efforts in Germany and the Soviet Union, and understand the new theorists in Europe and Latin America. But, while we can import theory from other times and places, the task of developing film theory and criticism in this country must grow out of our own practice of film criticism and out of an analysis of our own culture and political situation.

Criticism is the practice of theory, the application of theory to text. Traditionally, it has several constituent parts: establishment of the text, study or explication, analysis, and evaluation. Because each of these parts, as practiced, is informed by theory, criticism is the test of theory against objects. But criticism is not only a matter of taking theory to specific cases; it is also the ground on which specific cases help us develop theory. Bazin's theory collapses before ANTONIO DAS MORTES, and Sarris doesn't know what to do with the Cuban cinema. Because these theories are based on a very limited view of what cinema is and can be, they are unable to deal with works which don't conform to that pre-formed view—they are, in the worst sense, dogmatic. In contrast to such limited and limiting theory and criticism, we believe Marxism provides an inclusive theory for the study of all films. But we also recognize that applying Marxist theory to cinema, and thereby developing a vigorous film criticism, remains a project before us. For this reason we stress constant work with contemporary films to continually develop our theory in practice.

Reviewing—the practical and immediate application of criticism—is not separate from criticism. Obviously, as reviewing is most widely carried on, it is an integral part of the commercial system of film distribution and consumption. Reviews serve as consumer guides, which, considering the current price of film tickets, is an important and useful function. And reviews often function as entertainment in their own right. For those who have seen a particular film, a review serves as a kind of discourse a way for the reader to test her/his own perceptions and reactions. Some reviewers even see themselves as improving the state of the art and the audience's taste.

These functions of reviews are neither good nor bad; JUMP CUT's reviews serve there, too. But we want to go one more step. We want our reviews to serve as a basis for developing theory and as a meeting place for all media people. Unfortunately, there is an intellectual and especially academic prejudice against anything so practical and evaluation-ridden as a review. Or the other hand, filmmakers tend to dismiss reviewing as too intellectual and abstract. But reviews can be exactly the place where otherwise separate groups can meet and share ideas. It's in reviews that they can see their mutual interests—just as it as in political work that intellectuals and workers see their mutual interests most clearly.

But we have found that many intellectuals as well as filmmakers are unwilling to write reviews of current films. We think they fear that putting their ideas about a current film in print, where anyone who has

seen the film can read them and argue with them, will break down the mystery surrounding their particular craft—a mystery behind which they feel more comfortable. To deal with, to apply theory (conscious or not) to a film means that anyone who has read the review and seen the film becomes the critic's equal—something we think is very healthy. Thus we put great emphasis on reviews and favor ones in which the theory, the underlying assumptions of the reviewer, are expressed and tested on the film.

We see our intellectual work as taking place in the everyday world, as a totality with practical political work. Culture is an important part of the human experience. In a capitalist society, culture—particularly the media—is a weapon, a socializing force of the ruling class. Therefore, the struggle against this domination through analysis and education is an important task requiring both theory and practice,. We see JUMP CUT as an important part of this struggle. And we agree with Hans Magnus Enzensberger that

“any socialist strategy for the media must ... strive to end the isolation of the individual participants from the social learning and production process.”

Thus the film review is not only one important basis for developing film theory, it is also a nexus around which all media participants can gather. The film review serves to bring media people out of their isolation, to bring them into dialogue with one another—a dialogue out of which organization and struggle can grow.

JUMP CUT has, we think in our happier moments, an “agreeable diversity” which stands at the same time as an invitation, but which some see as a “disagreeable unevenness.” Sometimes we think that, too, but always in the context of JUMP CUT as an evolving practice and invitation. The tensions we feel between theory, criticism, reviewing, and political practice are inherent in our publication and are, also, creative tensions, We hope you think so too, and we invite your comments and participation.